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The Role of the Home in Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding and the Optimist's Daughter

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by

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Under the Direction of Pearl A. McHaney

ABSTRACT

Eudora Welty's sense of place is often discussed by scholars, but they have limited their discussions of place in Welty's texts to place as region or, more specifically, the South. In so doing, Welty is often pigeonholed as a regionalist writer. Looking at the home when considering place makes Welty's texts more universal and appealing to readers of all regions and countries. Every individual either has a home or longs for one; all understand the pull toward a home of some kind. Using the theoretical lens of social and psychological theories of space, place, and the home, this study presents a close reading of the homes in Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*. In addition, archival research from the Eudora Welty collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History aids in understanding how drafting the stories and the ways in which the stories evolved add to a reading of home in the texts. In her famous essay "Place in Fiction," Welty asks, "What place has place in fiction?" (781). In analyzing the role of the home in Welty's fiction, the reader must ask: What place has the home in fiction?

Analyzing the homes in *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughte*r reveals the characters' identities – both individual and collective identities, and in so doing, it allows the reader to better understand the motives behind the characters' actions and reactions.

INDEX WORDS: Home, Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding*, *The Optimist's Daughter*, Space, Place

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of Jonathan Devore –

who showed me the logic in dream chasing.

"In life and in work and in affection they were each shy, each bold, just where the other was not. . . .She had a certain gift of her own. He taught her, through his example, how to use it. She learned how to work by working beside him." (OD 161)

"But Memory was a reckless power, as independent of wish as the power of loving. The reminder of loss was still a part of her conscious effort to live, but was familiar now, almost in the nature of a comfort. Losing your love was like being given a compass, though too late for the journey." ("An Only Child" 9)

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And last, I am thankful for my family and the angels to whom I belong. It is because of them that my own connection to home is so strong. In the South, it is not odd that the family unit is the most central force in a person's life, and mine is no different. It is from my own interaction with my family, our home, and the rituals that take place in that home that this project grew. Were I not to possess a deep and intimate tie to my family and our home, I would never have known to look at the home in Welty's writing. I owe the most special thanks to Momma, Jeff, Molly, Charlie, and Anderson for their constant and never waiving support, enthusiasm, encouragement, and love, and I acknowledge the sacrifices they made to ensure my success in this project and life in general.

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INTRODUCTION

"Home" is a word that when mentioned brings about a myriad of thoughts and emotions that vary from person to person. It is a word that is used many times a day in various contexts with different meanings. Often times the meaning of home is assumed to be the place where one lives or resides – or the place or residence of a person's childhood. What "place" means here can vary from house to town or city to state or even region. When I hear the word home, my first thought is the brown house with blue shutters in which I was raised and where my mother still lives. But, immediately following that mental image, my small town of New Albany comes to mind; I think of my siblings and nephews who still live there, the courthouse where political rallies and church events were held, my church across the street, Wes Schooler field behind the high school where my friends and I played softball in the summers, or the graveyard on the other side of the interstate where my father and grandparents lie. When I hear the word "home," I also think of Mississippi – its cotton fields, its country roads, its scent of magnolias, its sordid history, its people. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains the idea of home in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), "A homeland has its landmarks, which may be features of high visibility and public significance, such as monuments, shrines, a hallowed battlefield or cemetery. These visible signs serve to enhance a people's sense of identity; they encourage awareness of loyalty to place" (159). Home may lie in physical markers of public or private significance.

Other ideas of home have nothing to do with current or childhood residences. People say, "I felt at home there" when referencing vacation spots, new cities, or even stores. To playing children, home often refers to the safe place in a game – the place where runs are scored or where they are safe from being tagged out (as in hide-and-seek or a simple tag game). Tuan

points out that "Tennessee Williams, in [*The Night of the Iguana*], suggests how home may well be another person, that is to say, how one human being can 'nest' in another" (140). In Williams' play, Hannah explains to Shannon how she finds a home in her grandfather (140). Clearly home's meanings are varied, and they move far from a physical structure or house. In fact, Linda McDowell points out, "The term 'the home' must be one of the most loaded words in the English language." (71). This can be seen through the various explanations of "the home" as well as through the examination of the role home plays in fiction.

Eudora Welty understood that home is more than a physical structure, and this is apparent throughout her writing. She asks in her essay "Place in Fiction," "Should the writer … write about home?" Then she answers her question: "It is both natural and sensible … that the place where we have our roots should become the setting, the first and primary proving ground, of our fiction." She continues, "There may come to be new places in our lives that are second spiritual homes – closer to us in some ways, perhaps than our original homes. But the home tie is the blood tie. And had it meant nothing to us, any other place thereafter would have meant less, and we would carry no compass inside ourselves to find home ever, anywhere at all" (794) Thus Welty's argument that the meaning of home helps to shape the meaning of every other place, makes clear how the physical place from which we come or in which we were raised, with its "blood tie," colors our subsequent sense of place and the perception of other places as congenial environments. It is important to note that Welty does not mention a house or any built structure when she here writes of home. By freeing the definition of home from the confines of a physical structure, Welty provides her readers with various types of homes through which the readers can find meaning.

Eudora Welty's sense of place is often discussed by scholars, but they have limited discussions of place in Welty's texts to place as region or, more specifically, the South. In so doing, Welty is often pigeonholed as a regionalist writer. Looking at the home when considering place makes Welty's texts more universal and appealing to readers of all regions and countries. Every individual either has a home or longs for one; all understand the pull toward a home of some kind. Analyzing the homes in *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughte*r reveals the characters' identities – both individual and collective identities and, in so doing, allows the reader to better understand the motives behind the characters' actions and reactions.

In order to analyze the role of home in Welty's fiction, a major question then is what exactly makes something "home." If a "house" – the often assumed explanation – is not necessarily a home, what constitutes the construction of the "compass" for finding a home feeling that Welty mentions in her famous essay about place? Kimberly Dovey "distinguish[es] between the concepts of *house* and *home*" in her essay, "Home and Homelessness":

> The use of a phrase such as *home ownership* treats house and home as synonymous terms. Although the meaning in this case is clear, in other usages it becomes more ambiguous. For instance, the statement *I don't have a home* may mean either that the speaker lacks access to a dwelling place or that the dwelling place does not carry the meaning and experience of *home*. [. . .] Although a house is an object, a part of the environment, home is best conceived of as a kind of relationship between people and their environment. It is an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places. (33-34)

In contrast to the physical structure of the house, a home is created by the emotional ties and relational ties that a person has with a place. David G. Saile writes in "The Ritual Establishment

of Home," "A residence should provide suitable spaces for household activities and should be structurally and climatically sound, but it becomes a home, [. . .] through ritual links" (90-91). The ritualistic occurrences in a home may range from daily activities such as family dinners and bedtime stories to seasonal events such as making snow cream, playing catch in the front yard, birthday parties, and holiday celebrations. Tuan echoes this idea when he writes, "Attachment of a deep though subconscious sort may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time" (159). Through ritual and familiarity over time a deep emotional relationship is formed between the home and those who inhabit it.

When asked about her own home of Jackson, Welty replies, "It's where I live and look around me – it's my piece of the world – it teaches me. Also as a domestic scene it's completely familiar and self-explanatory. It's not everything, though – it's just a piece of everything, that happens to be my sample" (*Conversations* 134). Tuan adds to this idea when he writes, "The home provides an image of the past. Moreover in an ideal sense home lies at the center of one's life, and center (we have seen) connotes origin and beginning" (128). Home is the beginning and center of people's view of the world and of their own identities. We are able to leave, to go out and explore the world, but our initial home colors the ways in which we explore, discover, and learn about the outside world. The same can be said of Welty's characters. Welty writes in her essay "Looking at Short Stories" (1978) that William Faulkner's story "The Bear" "is, equally purely, of the outer world – not simply the material three-dimensional outer world, which is good enough, but the measureless outer world of experience, the knowing and sentient past, the wisdom of Time and Place" (*Eye* 103). In this essay, Welty creates a link between place and experience. Tuan also points out the importance of linking place and experience with literature

when he writes, "In the large literature of environmental quality,[1] relatively few works attempt to understand how people feel about space and place, to take into account the different modes of experience [. . .] and to interpret space and place as images of complex – often ambivalent – feelings" (6-7). It is through experience that characters understand their own place – their homes – and how the characters fit into the outside world beyond home. Experience also aids the reader in understanding these places, and in so doing, the reader comes to better understand the characters. Phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), also argues for the importance of home in fiction. He writes, "On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (xxxvi). The home/house image does not merely present physical space, but significantly, fictive home/house serves as a reflection of human mind and thought. In an essay on Willa Cather, Welty wrote, "[T]he intensity of desire for building the house to live in – or worship in – fills the Cather novels. It fills the past for her, it gives the present meaning; it provides for a future: the house is the physical form, the *evidence* that we have lived, are alive now" (*Eye* 57).

Welty acknowledged frequently that "place" played a major role in her fiction. In her essay "Place in Fiction" (1956) she develops in detail the importance of "pinning down" a story by rooting it in place (781). Many scholars have contributed studies to the role of place in Welty's fiction and non-fiction, and many interviewers have asked Welty about the role of place in her stories. Welty writes in "Place in Fiction" of place as "one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction" (*Stories* 781). Yet she goes on to write of how place is as important as the other greater angels of "character, plot, symbolic meaning, and so on" (*Stories* 781). Bachelard's ideas on space parallel Welty's view of place in fiction. In the 1994 foreword to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (first translated into English in 1964), John R. Stilgoe writes

that Bachelard "elevates setting to its rightful place alongside character and plot, and offers readers a new angle of vision that reshapes any understanding of great paintings and novels, and folktales, too" (x). If for Welty place is as important to a story as character and plot, and if the home place, specifically, shapes the individual's subsequent feelings about the understanding of the outside world, then a study of the home in Welty's fiction can open many avenues of understanding her characters and her works as a whole.

For this study, I have chosen two complementary novels, *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*.[2] *Delta Wedding* was Welty's first novel-length work of fiction, *The Optimist's Daughter* her last. Both novels center upon the family unit and monumental family rituals – the wedding in *Delta Wedding* and the optimist's funeral in *The Optimist's Daughter*, and both include a myriad of daily rituals that show the emotional relationships that exist between the characters and their homes. Both novels began as short stories, and were later expanded into novel form (though Welty mentioned in interviews that she still sees *The Optimist's Daughter* as a long story).[3] The various drafts of each provide more detail and insight into Welty's composition of "home" and her characters' relationships to their home places.

Fewer drafts of *Delta Wedding* are available in the Eudora Welty collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History than for *The Optimist's Daughter*. In 1942, Welty wrote a short story titled "Delta Cousins" and sent it to her agent Diarmuid Russell who read it and sent it to the editor Mary Lou Aswell at *Harper's Bazaar*. Both Russell and Aswell felt the story was the beginning of a novel but needed to be shortened before it would sell as a story. Welty felt that simply cutting the story would hurt it. In a December 31, 1944, letter to Russell, Welty writes, "[Aswell] suggests cutting and patching but I don't think it can be helped just by subtracting incidents and cousins from it, I think it needs both cutting and reworking."

Welty continued working on it sporadically. “Delta Cousins” was not the only Delta story she wrote during this time. She included another story in a December 19, 1944, letter to John Robinson. This story, titled “A Little Triumph,” is a draft of what becomes part one of Chapter II in the novel. The first draft of the novel as a whole available in the Eudora Welty collection is the typescript, dated 1945. The novel was published in *Atlantic Monthly* as *Delta Wedding* in 1946. It appeared in four parts, and each part was published in one issue from January through April 1946. Harcourt, Brace and Company published the novel without revisions in book form in 1946 after all parts had appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*. The final version of the novel has seven chapters and each chapter is broken into parts ranging from two to nine in a chapter.[4]

The evolution of *The Optimist’s Daughter* is more evident because there are more drafts available in the Eudora Welty collection. The first draft of the story is titled “Baltimore,” and by the next draft, the title had changed to “An Only Child.” While there is no date on either story, they both had to have been written between January of 1966 when Welty’s mother and brother died and 1967 when the first dated draft of “An Only Child” was written. Welty’s next draft, which she titles “Poor Eyes,” also has no date indicated. The draft that Welty labels “Original New Yorker MS” began with the title “The Optimist’s Daughter,” but Welty marked through it and wrote “Poor Eyes” above it. The carbons of this typescript have the same markings, but Welty marks through “Poor Eyes” and writes “The Optimist’s Daughter” above it. Welty explains in an interview with Sally Wolff that neither her agent Russell nor her *New Yorker* editor William Maxwell liked the title “Poor Eyes,” but Maxwell liked “The Optimist’s Daughter” (*More Conversations* 165). The typescript of the *New Yorker* story is also available in the archives, and it is dated June 13, 1967 (“Poor Eyes” 46). After the *New Yorker* published the story in March of 1969, Welty took some time to revise it before publishing it as a novel. In that

same interview with Wolff, Welty explains, "The publisher might have wanted to go ahead and print the novel as it was published in the *New Yorker*. But I wanted a waiting period to let things settle to see how I felt about it. I wanted to let a little time pass" (165). By 1971, Welty was on at least her second draft of the story in novel form. Galleys, page proofs, repos, blues, and final signatures drafts are all available in the Eudora Welty collection, and Welty made minor changes at every stage until the final signatures draft. Random House published the novel in 1972. The novel is broken into four chapters, and chapters one through three all have four parts while chapter four is not subdivided.

Delta Wedding begins with nine-year-old Laura McRaven on a train from her home in Jackson, Mississippi, to the Delta to visit her mother's family and witness the wedding of her cousin, Dabney Fairchild. The novel centers on the family's wedding preparations in the week leading up to the ceremony, the wedding, and the transition back into everyday life during the two days following the wedding. The perspective shifts throughout the novel as a third-person narrator limits the narration to the points of view of specific female characters in different sections; these limited perspectives primarily come from Laura, Ellen, and Robbie, but the perspectives of Shelley, Dabney, India, and Aunt Tempe also appear, though less frequently. Through the shifting perspectives, Welty weaves together a story that presents a tapestry of a a large family, relationships, history, and plantation homes.

The Optimist's Daughter also begins with a journey. Laurel McKelva Hand travels to New Orleans to meet her father and step-mother at the eye-doctor's office. Chapter one of the novel occurs in New Orleans where all three McKelvas – Laurel; her father, Clint; and her step-mother, Fay – stay through Judge McKelva's surgery, a month-long recovery, and ultimately Judge McKelva's death. Laurel McKelva Hand and her step-mother, Fay McKelva, travel home

to Mount Salus for the funeral and burial, which span chapter two, and at the end of the chapter, Fay returns to Texas with her family. Chapter three focuses on Laurel in the three days after the funeral. During this time, Laurel spends time with the lifelong friends of her parents and herself, she reflects back on her parents' life and her life with them, and she mentally prepares herself to forever leave the home in which she was born and raised. Chapter four centers on Laurel's last morning in Mount Salus and the inevitable conflict between Laurel and Fay. The novel ends with Laurel leaving Mount Salus to return to her home in Chicago.

Welty scholarship has shifted over the years from New Critical close readings to biographical and feminist interpretations.[5] Many have written on the role of mythology in Welty's fiction, most notably Thomas McHaney's essay, "Eudora Welty and the Multitudinous Golden Apples,"[6] and others have focused on Welty and Modernism.[7] Several essays have been written on Welty and the use of place.[8] However, Jan Nordby Gretlund's book-length study, *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place*, remains the only monograph about place in Welty. Gretlund focuses on Welty's place as a writer, on her Southern background, and on her overall Southern-ness. Other scholars who write about Welty and place focus primarily on the Southern-ness of Welty's fiction[9] and how her fiction depicts the South in which she lived. Bessie Chronaki explains that the three constructions of place in Welty's writing are "the Southern family, the Southern community, and the Southern heritage" (36). My study differs from these by looking at the domestic, rather than regional spaces inhabited by Welty's characters; I focus on the homes of Welty's characters not on the places where Welty herself lived or visited. I do not examine how Welty's writing is characteristically regionalist or how it characterizes the American South and the changes to the American South throughout Welty's life, as that has been done before.[10] I

explore instead the specific homes of her characters and how these homes influence the actions and thoughts of the various characters.

Scholarship on *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* is as varied as all other Welty scholarship. Ruth Vande Kieft offers a New Critical reading of both texts in *Eudora Welty,* and John Crowe Ransom provides the same type of reading of *Delta Wedding* in his essay "Delta Fiction." Scholars have also focused on the novels as regional texts and have considered cultural and historical aspects of the novels.[11] Michael Kreyling looks at the writing of *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* in *Author and Agent*, and Suzanne Marrs' book *What There Is To Say We Have Said* presents insight into the writing of *The Optimist's Daughter*. Since *Delta Wedding* is told through various female perspectives and *The Optimist's Daughter*'s protagonist is a woman, there has been a good bit of gender and feminist scholarship on the novels.[12] Most recently, Reine Dugas Bouton has edited *Eudora Welty's* Delta Wedding, the first book of scholarship focused solely on Welty's first novel. Scholars have focused a good bit of time on the autobiographical aspects of *The Optimist's Daughter*,[13] and Kreyling explains that the publication of *One Writer's Beginnings* changed these autobiographical readings because before the autobiography was published, scholars focused on the central family unit of Judge, Becky, and Laurel McKelva and the conflict between Laurel and Fay (*Understanding* 209, 212). *One Writer's Beginnings* provided a different take on *The Optimist's Daughter*, and Kreyling believes the autobiography gives an annotation to the novel (*Understanding* 212). Scholars have also looked at social issues as presented in *The Optimist's Daughter* and have dealt with issues of race and class.[14] These scholarly works provide a platform upon which this study is able to build.

Throughout this study, I use the theoretical lens of social and psychological theories of space, place, and the home to present a close reading of Welty's two texts. I implement archival

research from the Eudora Welty collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to consider how drafting the stories and the various forms they take add to a social and psychological theoretical reading of home in the texts. The study is organized in four chapters, and each chapter has two parts – the first part of each chapter deals with *Delta Wedding*, and the second part concerns *The Optimist's Daughter*. In chapter one, I examine the importance of home for the characters in formulating their own identity – both as a family unit and as individuals. The homes take on and share the identity of the people who inhabit them. Once the reader understands the identity of the characters and how that is shared in the home, that reader can see the way in which the individual identity impacts the social realm of the community, which is the topic in chapter two. In chapter three, I look at characters who are outsiders in comparison to those who are insiders – either to the identity shared between the character/family and the home or the social community. The fourth and final chapter focuses on the characters that journey away from or return to home; it is often this journey that causes characters to realize what home means to them and to understand the identity shared with that home.

People, as a whole, tend to expect home to remain the same, forever, and this is true of Welty's characters as well. Welty writes, "A child, quite naturally thinks his own world – his house, his street, his town – is going to stay forever the way it is, in the same way that he thinks his own family will always be where he sees them now, and exactly the same" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 34). Children are wrong, as time passes, homes do not always stay the same. They change – sometimes slowly or over a long period of time and sometimes quickly in an instant. Through studying the way the characters identify home and how that identity and character change throughout the duration of the novels, the reader may develop a greater understanding of what sense home means to the individual characters and can come to appreciate that the novels

are dependent on the home place as the catalyst from which all of the characters' actions and thoughts stem. In her famous essay "Place in Fiction," Welty asks, "What place has place in fiction?" (781). In analyzing the role of the home in Welty's fiction, the reader must ask: What place has the home in fiction?

CHAPTER ONE: THE SHARED IDENTITY

In "Place in Fiction," Welty writes: "One element . . . is surely the underlying bond that connects all the arts with place. All of them celebrate its mystery. Where does this mystery lie? Is it in the fact that place has a more lasting identity than we have, and we unswervingly tend to attach ourselves to identity?" (783). While she is writing about art, Welty raises an interesting concept that she claims is true – "that place has a more lasting identity than we have." Werner, Altman, and Oxley add to this observation in "Temporal Aspects of Home" when they write, "[P]eople and their environments are an integral and inseparable unit; they cannot be defined separately, and indeed are mutually defining" (2). They continue, "[T]he ideas of place attachment and place identity suggest that when people attach psychological, social, and cultural significance to objects and spaces, they thereby bond themselves and the environment into a unity" (5). In a similar vein, Dovey believes, "Identity implies a certain bonding or mergence of person and place such that the place takes its identity from the dweller and the dweller takes his or her identity from the place. There is an integrity, a connectedness between the dweller and dwelling" (40). Clearly there is an important link between a person's identity and the identity of the home. An analysis of the identities of the homes reveals the characters' identities as well. In order to determine the role of home in the novels, it is necessary to consider the identity of the homes and ways in which Welty presents the homes to the reader.

Shellmound, the main Fairchild home in *Delta Wedding*, serves as the prominent setting in the novel and best represents the ideas of home for the Fairchilds. Welty uses the name of a small, Delta town for the name of her plantation, and she considered using Shellmound as the title of the story.[15] Welty writes to the Delta native John Robinson, "In your letter you mentioned the name of the town Shellmound -- & it sounded just like the Delta, I had never heard it . . . To

me it casts a spell" (June 10, 1945). Welty puts a great deal of consideration into the name of Shellmound because it is the primary and most prominent home for the Fairchild family, but it is not the only Fairchild home. The Grove, referred to by Ellen as "the old place" (30), was initially the primary hub of the lives of the Fairchilds. Shellmound and The Grove share an identity, and they share this identity with the Fairchilds. In many ways, Shellmound is an extension of the original family home and a larger example of the Fairchild identity that began with Great-Grandfather George Fairchild, his wife Mary Shannon Fairchild, and their children.

The Grove was built by Great-Grandfather George Fairchild for Mary Shannon, and Marmion was built by Great-Grandfather George's son James Fairchild for his wife Laura Allen. When James and Laura Allen Fairchild died, Aunt Mac and Aunt Shannon (James' sisters) brought James and Laura Allen's children from Marmion to The Grove and raised them there. Tempe, the oldest child of James and Laura Allen, inherits The Grove, but when she got married and moved away, she gave the home to George. Everyone in the family considers George the rightful owner of The Grove, but he allows his sisters Primrose and Jim Allen to live there (128). Welty also reveals that Battle's eldest daughter Shelley was born at The Grove (303), and when Shelley's mother Ellen tells this story, she implies that Aunt Mac and Aunt Shannon were not living at The Grove at that time. More than likely they were living at Shellmound. Marmion remains abandoned after James and Laura Allen Fairchild's deaths until the end of the novel.[16] Whether Jim Allen and Primrose were living at The Grove at the time Shelley was born is somewhat unclear; Ellen simply says they "were still out at a dance" (283), but it would make sense that the aunts still lived at The Grove and would return there after the dance. The Grove was the childhood home of all of the adult Fairchilds in the novel including Shelley and Dabney. Gaston Bachelard writes about how the first home remains significant even after its inhabitants

have left. He points out that all subsequent homes are modeled after and are merely a variation of the childhood home (14-5). When Battle, Ellen, and their children move to Shellmound, they model rooms in their new home after The Grove. The most obvious example of this is the second set of parlor furniture that was moved from The Grove to Shellmound. Kimberly Dovey agrees that the childhood home is important; she writes, "Home thus has strong roots in the experiences of childhood where the visual images of home were formed" (37). The Fairchilds formed their idea of home – and subsequently, their family identity – at The Grove; they then carried that identity to Shellmound.

While the adults in the novel see The Grove as the Fairchilds' childhood home, the children in the novel do not. The children in the novel, with the exception of Laura and Lady Clare, see Shellmound as their childhood home. Laura and Lady Clare, however, do not and have not lived in Shellmound or any of the Fairchild homes, but they have made annual visits there for years.[17] Laura sees Shellmound as the primary home of the Fairchilds and identifies the Fairchilds and Shellmound together. Arriving at Shellmound, she drops her suitcase and runs to the backyard to joggle with two of her male cousins. On the joggling board between Roy and Little Battle, Laura jumps. With only a few asides to acknowledge the fact that Laura is being crowded on one side or the other by one of her cousins, the narrator carries the reader deep into Laura's thoughts. Welty writes that when Laura began to jump, "the delights of anticipation seemed to shake her up and down" (95).

As Laura is shaken by her anticipation of what is to occur during her stay in the Delta, she takes the reader through her memory of Shellmound. Beginning with the blue cooler on the back porch, Laura's mind wanders first around the back side of the yard and porch before entering the house and moving through the parlor. When explaining how the house image is one

of stability, Bachelard writes, "A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of its verticality" (17), and this is true for Shellmound as presented through Laura's memories. She begins outside and slowly works her way through the house, bottom to top, remembering the details of furniture and accessories as well as smells and sounds.

> [I]n the parlor she knew was a clover-shaped footstool covered with rose velvet where she would sit, and sliding doors to the music room that she could open and shut. In the halls would be the rising smell of girls' fudge cooking, the sound of the phone by the roll-top desk going unanswered. (95-6)

Laura remembers the things that have defined this place for her as in her mind she makes her way from the parlor to the dining room to the hall upstairs. Winifred Gallagher writes that, "Where home is concerned … visiting a past dwelling can be such a powerful experience. Suddenly we're surrounded by environmental cues that call up feelings and memories – particularly of very happy or sad times there" (12). For Laura, the home and the furnishings provide her memory with the history of her family, their stories, and their traditions. This home brings an emotional connection to past visits there. In a novel where direct storytelling appears regularly, Welty does not use that point of view to convey this family's history and presence. Instead, she uses the home itself – which shares an identity with the family – in order to reveal the family history, traditions, and customs. The story about George saving Maureen from being run over by the Yellow Dog train on the trestle is the only story that is orated several times. Instead, most family stories are revealed through paintings, gun racks, flowers, a nightlight, and other material possessions within the Fairchild homes. Yi-Fu Tuan writes, "Home is an intimate place. We think of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building . . . as by its components and furnishings" (144). This is very

much so in the Fairchild family homes. The stories of the past that influence the thoughts and actions of the characters express themselves through place and family objects. Suzanne Marrs writes about *Losing Battles*, "The past for the family is not something to be forgotten or transcended; it is something to be remembered and retold" (*One Writer's Imagination* 207), and this is equally true for *Delta Wedding* where the current patriarch is named Battle and every object and structure and landscape feature resonates with family events, feelings, and tales.

Welty's description of Shellmound spans over two pages, as Laura mentally tours the home and history that become more and more familiar with every remembrance. Bachelard believes that memories are soundest when they are secured in a space (9), and for Laura, this particular home, Shellmound, is a place full of people living and dead and their stories.

> She remembered life in the undeterminate number of other rooms going on around her and India, where they lay in bed – life not stopping for a moment in deference to children going to sleep, but filling with later and later laughter, with Uncle Battle reciting "Break! Break! Break!," the phone ringing its two longs and a short for the Fairchilds, Aunt Mac reading the Bible aloud (was she dead yet?), the visiting planters arguing with Uncle Battle and her other uncle, Uncle George, from dining room to library to porch, Aunt Ellen slipping by in the hall looking for something or someone, the distant silvery creak of the porch swing by night, like a frog's voice. (96-7)

Welty uses Laura's memory of a place filled with life to sketch a busy portrait of people, setting, and time, all recalled through feeling. She introduces characters – cousins, aunts, uncles, other Delta planters – not through narration but with the lively mind of a child. Welty initially uses the

home as a trope to reacquaint Laura with her maternal family and, in so doing, introduces the reader to the family and their lifestyle.

Laura remembers most vividly the dining room. Her recall of the small details shows that she had spent a good bit of time here during previous trips to Shellmound. The family uses the dining room as a space to strengthen the identity of the whole of the Fairchild clan. The dining room is where the Fairchilds gather most frequently, and when the family is gathered, the family identity is most intact. While a few family members may meet at various other places throughout the day, the entire family assembles in the dining room to share meals. Laura recalls, "It was hard to quite ever leave the dining room" (105), so the family remains together in the dining room long after meals end, relaxing, interacting playfully, and telling stories. It is in this primary room that the story of George's heroic act of saving Maureen on the trestle (a story that weaves its way throughout the novel carrying varying degrees of significance for all of the family members) is twice orated – first to Laura on her night of arrival and later to Mr. Rondo on his first visit to Shellmound. Architect Donlyn Lyndon writes of the *aedicule*, translated from Latin as shrine or small house. She explains:

> It's a little house within a house that helps you understand the larger one. That marks a place in the home that you care about, or that your life moves around, or where you put the stuff you like best. You just like knowing it's there. The *aedicula* sets up a counterpoint between the fluid, improvised, changeable aspect of domestic life and this thing that keeps saying, "There's something central here that's always here." (qtd in Gallagher 44-5)

The dining room, filled with heirloom furniture and gathered family members, serves as the *aedicula* of Shellmound. When Laura first enters Shellmound, it is the room to which she

immediately runs (99). It remains the central place for the Fairchilds where they encourage storytelling, teasing, and remembering.

The Fairchild identity is one of solidarity that is dependent upon seeing the family as a whole – as one entity – and not as individual members. One thing that enforces this solidarity is the way in which the Fairchilds are all alike. In the dining room the reader sees just how much alike the Fairchilds are to one another, and the men seem to show this most. The Fairchild men are at times described individually, but the descriptions could match several of them. For example, when describing James and Laura Allen's oldest son Denis from his niece Dabney's point of view, the narrator points out that Denis "squandered away his life loving people too much, was too kind to his family, was torn to pieces by other people's misfortune, married beneath him," and that he studied law (205). All of these things, down to the fact that he studied law, also can be said of Denis's youngest brother, George. George's wife, Robbie, is hurt by George's love of and kindness to his family. His family sees his love for his wife as a flaw and is embarrassed by his marrying Robbie Reid – whom they feel is clearly beneath them. The reader also sees the way in which the Fairchild men seem interchangeable when Battle's wife Ellen is describing George and his older brother Battle. She describes them together as if they were the same person, making only a few distinctions between the two (Battle weighs more and George remains left handed – though that is something all Fairchilds originally were) (110-11). Ellen also discusses the weight and size of the Fairchild men, noting that marrying little women had done nothing to change the look of Fairchilds. The family members remain a unit and find solidarity in their looks. In the way that death or marriage could not ruin the family unit as a whole, women of different stature could not change the family traits and, therefore, identity.

The parlor serves as an extension of the dining room. The similarities of all Fairchilds, regardless the generation, are also predominantly recognized when the family is in the parlor. Upon remembering the painting of Great-Great-Grandfather George[18] in the parlor, Laura quickly realizes that Fairchild men are all alike: "Even he, she had learned by looking up at him, had the family trait of quick, up-turning smiles, instant comprehension of the smallest eddy of life in the current of the day, which would surely be entered in a kind of reckless pleasure" (102). Laura is able to see in the painting the stories of all Fairchild men after Great-Great-Grandfather George. The painting, done by his brother, hangs in the Shellmound parlor as an overseeing eye to all future Fairchilds. The Fairchild men seek to live up to the names given them (however short they may fall), and they perpetuate the Fairchild ideal in so doing.

The men are not the only ones who do not change from generation to generation; the family homes do not change either. The parlor at Shellmound houses the same furniture as the parlor at The Grove; in fact, this furniture once resided at The Grove. During Mashula Hines's day, there had been two parlors at The Grove, and at some point the family moved one set of furnishings to Shellmound (128). Gallagher explains, "Then . . . large homes might have two parlors – one a casual family room and another for important visitors and formal occasions" (65). More than likely, the family's casual parlor's furniture went to Shellmound while the nicer, more formal room's furniture remained in the parlor at The Grove. Thus the furniture in the parlor, like the Fairchild identity, shows continuity from one generation to the next among the Fairchilds. The moving of the furniture, much like the somewhat casual ownership transfers of the family properties, also points to the loose ownership of all things Fairchild.[19] The furniture from the second parlor in The Grove was simply moved to Shellmound for use by whichever family members were living there at the time. The footstool from the Shellmound parlor Laura

remembers while joggling with her cousins is the same footstool that her Great-Grandmother kept in the second parlor at The Grove. Again the emphasis is that the Fairchild identity has been passed down from generation to generation and home to home time and again.

Tempe (Battle Fairchild's sister whose name suggests time – the past and the future in her case) seems the most concerned with carrying on the ideal Fairchild identity even though her marriage has carried her away from Fairchilds to Inverness. She finds what her sister-in-law Ellen wears to town inappropriate for the Delta. She is the most horrified by the trend in marrying beneath themselves that her family member is about to repeat with Dabney's marriage to the young overseer, Troy Flavin. Tempe is also bothered by how outdated Shellmound has become under Ellen's care (or, as Tempe believes, the lack thereof). Shellmound, the primary Fairchild family home at the time of the novel's action, Tempe seems to believe, must showcase the best and finest because the Fairchild family's reputation in the community demands only the best and finest. She also wonders why dead flowers would ever be allowed to stand in front of "the original Mr. George Fairchild" (186), the family patriarch still represented there by a painting. Tempe seems to take the dead flowers as an affront. The flowers in front of this portrait – much like the flowers on a grave – should be fresh and show the respect that is due to the family patriarch.

But she too seems caught between preserving the old and desiring the new. Gallagher says, "The living room or area is the home's most expressive space" (51), and looking around the parlor makes Tempe question what exactly the room expresses. After telling Vi'let to rid the room of the dead flowers, Tempe stops to take in the entire room. Her gaze around the room stops on the guns in the corner, which remind Tempe of dangers that her family members have faced –the death of family members, the dangerous deeds of these dead Fairchilds, or the

looming danger for Laura Allen, whose husband had been killed in a duel over cotton leaving her to care for a family and plantation by herself. Albert Devlin writes of the family items in the house that, "The memorabilia of Shellmound first evoke the same wilderness days that engaged the imagination of Clement Musgrove [of *The Robber Bridegroom*] and tested the enterprise of Aaron Burr [of "First Love"] and then project this imbedded story of settlement through successive generations of Fairchilds that culminate in the present life at Shellmound" (*Eudora Welty's Chronicle* 94). The guns are reminders of settlement days long ago and of those family members no longer present. However, whom the guns specifically belonged to makes no difference to Tempe. But, she recalls it was *Somebody's* gun that played a role in each family story (187). The guns have become part of the Fairchild history. The idea that a weapon would be used as decoration seems to disgust Tempe but not shock or pain her. Suzanne Marrs writes, "Both Tempe and India ignore the powerful and complex questions the firearms might evoke and arrive at a motto that neither can live by – that women should quietly accept the actions of their men" (*One Writer's Imagination* 92). Marrs may be right, but the women also come to a motto that Tempe and India can live by and *have* lived by – that Fairchilds should quietly accept the violent actions of the Fairchild past and display the relics of these actions as evidence of their heroics. The weapons have become heirlooms equal to the paintings, Mashula Hines's cookbook, and the furniture that moved from the second parlor at The Grove to the parlor at Shellmound. No matter the lives taken by the guns that stand in the parlor, the Fairchild identity has not changed, and the family unit has not faltered. These guns could only be in a place where the Fairchilds are understood as one entity and are not individualized into different members of different generations; otherwise, the reminder of pain and death brought by the sight of the guns would be too much. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan believes, "Permanence is an important element in

the idea of place. Things and objects endure and are dependable in ways that human beings, with their biological weaknesses and shifting moods, do not endure and are not dependable" (140). The guns and other family heirlooms in the parlor have lasted longer than the individual people, and these objects become important to the feelings of the Fairchilds of even the latest generation.

In the parlor, much like the dining room, the family is a single, living being that began generations before the ones currently occupying Shellmound and The Grove, and the Fairchild assumption is that it will live generations beyond them. Denying the individual and focusing solely on the collective also provides this permanence. Where human beings die and have "biological weaknesses and shifting moods," the family – when seen as a collective body – does not. One family member's tragedy or flaw does not weaken or hurt the over-all body; therefore, the individual straying from the accepted ways of the family does not weaken or change the collective Fairchild family identity.

Tempe is not the only person who realizes that the oneness of the Fairchilds exists in the parlor in Shellmound and in the parlor in The Grove. Robbie Reid recalls a time when she was brought into the parlor at The Grove and seated across from a painting of Mary Shannon. She remembers the painting of "the old-time Fairchild lady with the look on her face. It was obviously turned upon her husband, upon a Fairchild, and it was condemning" (134-5). The way in which Robbie Reid remembers this implies that she too understands "the look" as something she's seen all women give to Fairchild men and that she too has also given to her Fairchild husband, George, named for the patriarch in the parlor portrait. There appears to be an implication that Great-Grandfather George was no different than any other Fairchild, including the George to whom Robbie is married. Battle's wife Ellen also notes the way in which the Fairchilds see each other as one whole and not individuals. The night of the wedding rehearsal,

she ponders, “Here in the closest intimacy the greatest anonymity lay, and a kind of basking, a special pleasure, was in it” (278). This is clearly true with the Fairchilds and their homes. When Dabney visits The Grove the day before the rehearsal and her aunts insist she take a present, Dabney wants a flower bowl that reminds her of the two aunts who live at The Grove, Jim Allen and Primrose. Dabney wonders, “[W]as it the little bunny in one mouth that looked like Aunt Jim Allen, and the little partridge in the other that was Aunt Primrose?” (132). However, the aunts feel that the flower bowl is not a sufficient present; instead, they want her to have something that reminds her of the Fairchilds as a whole – not just the two aunts individually. So, they give her the one object that many in the family adore above all other objects, the china nightlight. It was originally used as comfort (or “company” as the family calls it) for a group of sisters and their sister-in-law all waiting, watching for their husbands to come home from the Civil War (133). It later becomes comfort to Jim Allen and Primrose and their siblings after the death of their parents (132). The aunts give it to Dabney hoping it will bring her comfort or company when she needs it. That the nightlight holds no significance for Dabney does not matter to the aunts; what matters to them is that they have given her a family heirloom – sharing an identity with the family – that they believe she can use to transfer the family identity back to the emotionally and physically abandoned Fairchild house, Marmion. As a whole, the Fairchilds liked being seen as one entity instead of as multiple individuals who differ in more ways than they would ever admit.

The night of the rehearsal, while Dabney stands by herself in front of the mantelpiece in the parlor looking out over her family, her mood becomes reflective. Yet, her thoughts are not about herself. She thinks about her family and how they are acting. Dabney does not contemplate her own life, her decision to marry Troy, or what life will be like as a young bride living at

Marmion. She ponders instead her parents' responses to her engagement. While Dabney may very well love Troy, in this moment she thinks of him as a test to see what her family will do if she marries him. Gallagher explains, "Perhaps the most influential voices belong to the family forebears, whose passed-down code of dos and don'ts is 'remembered' by the . . . room" (58). Dabney knows her actions go against the Fairchild code of behaviors that were established generations ago, and she ponders why none of her family members have made a scene to remind her of this.

The stairs – which connect the two levels of the house – and the hall – which connects the various rooms – serve as extensions to the dining room and parlor. They are the passageways to the heart of the house. As extensions to the most used rooms, the hall and stairs (predominantly the downstairs hallway and the foot of the stairs) serve as areas with atmospheres of family unity much like in the parlor and dining room. The stairs and hallway are places where family members shout to one another in other rooms, dance to Dabney's friend Mary Lamar playing piano music, and walk hurriedly to grab things from different rooms.

The stairs and hallway are also the setting for at least one quiet conversation. Ellen asks George to carry a cup of broth up to Aunt Shannon. They begin to talk about Aunt Shannon, but their conversation only reiterates the idea of the family as a singular clan – possessing a singular identity and without individuals. Ellen and George both understand what the narrator soon reveals to the reader.

> Aunt Shannon never wept over Laura, as if she could not do it over one motherless child, or give her any immediate notice. In her the Fairchild oblivion to the member of the family standing alone was most developed; . . . Insistently a little messenger or reminder of death, Laura self-consciously struck her pose

> again and again, but she was a child too familiar, too like all her cousins, too much one of them (as they all were to one another a part of their very own continuousness at times) ever to get the attention she begged for. By Aunt Shannon in particular, the members of the family were always looked on with that general tenderness and love out of which the single personality does not come bolting and clamorous, but just as easily emerges gently, like a star when it is time, into the sky and by simply emerging drifts back into the general view and belongs to the multitudinous heavens. All were dear, all were unfathomable, all were constantly speaking. . .(150-1)

Both George and Ellen know that Aunt Shannon cannot grieve for Laura because she cannot see the family members as individuals. All the cousins, nieces, and nephews are all the same, as were the two family homes – merely pieces that make up the whole, interchangeable pieces at that. The fact that none of the family members have ever told Laura they loved her also can be explained by the idea of the family as one whole unit and not individuals. In the way that grieving for one is impossible, loving one as an individual is impossible as well.

Welty, four years before she finished *Delta Wedding*, was disheartened by people's reactions to the war, and she writes in a letter to her agent Diarmuid Russell on December 23, 1941: "People must be taken one by one in the world, that is the way they are loved, believed, or understood." Welty understood that in order to be loved, a person has to be an individual, and this understanding reveals itself in Laura's realization that the family had never told her they loved her (105). Robbie Reid is right when, later in the novel, she tells them they are only loving themselves in each other (254-5), and Aunt Shannon is the most guilty of this.

Aunt Shannon, the aunt who gets her times confused, is the greatest propagator of the Fairchild identity. In her mind, all the dead still live and interact with her. For Aunt Shannon, who with Aunt Mac raised the current adult generation of Fairchilds, the family history and identity live in her head with the dead Fairchilds as well as in family heirlooms scattered throughout the Fairchild homes. Ellen and George's conversation on the stairs brings Aunt Shannon's idea of the oneness of all Fairchilds to that particular place. M. E. Bradford echoes this in his essay, "Fairchild as Composite Protagonist in *Delta Wedding,*" where he writes, "In *Delta Wedding* we have no single hero or heroine. Instead the protagonist of the novel is the family Fairchild, to whom all of its characters relate in one fashion or another. And the action is the survival of that family as a composite entity which protects and sustains the distinctive and internal lives of its component parts" (201). Aunt Shannon has experienced too much and lost too many people close to her to grieve over Laura; for her, as long as the Fairchild family and their shared identity live on, there is nothing for which, and no one for whom to grieve.

Later when Laura tries to follow her dancing cousins up the stairs, she is stopped by the sight of George and Ellen standing at the foot of the stairs. The narrator points out, "There was too much secrecy, too much pity at the stairs, she could not get by" (191). While this secrecy could be referring to Robbie's leaving George, this seems unlikely. First, everyone knows about Robbie and George, and it was not what George and Ellen were discussing. What Laura could be referring to is the secrecy of the falsehood of the ideal Fairchild identity. While most of the family believe in the Fairchild ideal, they also know that maintaining this ideal is impossible. They know that they can only live up to the Fairchild identity when they are seen as a whole and seen within the walls of the family homes, and because of this, they pity themselves. Individually, they stray far from the ideal. Laura, who cannot call Shellmound home, is unable to

go between Ellen and George unlike the rest of the children. She is unable to continue to believe in the existence of the Fairchild ideal. Setting herself apart from the Fairchilds challenges Laura's sense of belonging, and she wants to flee. The narrator says, "Where could she go just to hold out her arms and be taken, quickly – what other way, dark, out of sight of what was here and going by? She suddenly considered snatching Roxie's cake and running out the back" (191). Laura wants to get outside the house, to be anywhere other than there, to be free from the oppressive burden of belonging to the Fairchild clan and sharing the Fairchild identity. Ultimately, Laura wants to go home. Unable to flee or go home, however, she then pities herself: "But I'm a poor little motherless girl, she thought, and sat down on the bottom step and cried a tear into the hem of her skirt, for herself" (192). Once she separates herself from them and observes the Fairchild clan, she realizes her connection to the Fairchilds was lost with the death of her mother.

It is two days after this realization that in the same hall Ellen catches Laura to speak with her about staying at Shellmound for good. Laura is unhappy about the idea of living in Shellmound and confused about the fact that she had not been told from the beginning they wanted her to stay. Her feeling of being cheated, however, is "answered overly soon, overly brightly" (326). How could it be that she wanted to stay at Shellmound when she knew all along she would return to Jackson to live with her father? She also pleads that she does not want to go to Marmion – a place she has already been. When Battle begins to explain to Laura that Marmion will be hers, Tempe stops him saying, "That's all too complicated to think of now, here in the hall" (326). Tempe wants Marmion to be seen as family property that Dabney is welcome to use. She sees the hall as a place inappropriate for discussing individual rights to land – individual rights to anything. In the midst of all the talk of Marmion and to whom it belongs, "Laura felt

that in the end she would go – go from all this, go back to her father" (326). Laura holds dear the secret that she has a plan of escaping the Fairchild identity – separating herself from the clan and individualizing her own identity with her non-Fairchild father in Jackson. She has found a way to see her mother as Annie Laurie McRaven, not Annie Laurie Fairchild and to separate her mother from the Fairchild identity, and Laura no longer feels a need to grieve this loss of her Fairchild connection. Laura does not want to be a part of the Fairchild clan and its complex history.[20]

Laura recognizes the trap that the Fairchilds set by taking each other as features of a group and not individually, and she sees the way Uncle George struggles with it:

> She stored love for Uncle George fiercely in her heart, she wished Shellmound would burn down and she could run in and rescue him, she prayed for God to bless him – for she felt they all crowded him so, the cousins, inviting too much, daring him not to be faultless, and she would have liked to clear them away, give him room. (164)

Laura sees burning down Shellmound, the home where the family is gathered and many live and that serves as a representation of the Fairchild identity, as George's only escape from the pressure the Fairchilds put upon him to be the heroic brother/uncle who fulfills perfectly the family's ideal. She wants so badly to rescue him, but she cannot do so as long as the main home, Shellmound, still stands and the family still gathers together there to strengthen their identity as one united clan in order to hold the family close together. Laura's desire to burn down Shellmound clues the reader to the fact that the Fairchild home is not merely location or setting for the story but a place that holds much more significance. The home is the physical marker of the Fairchild identity – both to the people of Fairchilds and to Welty's reader.

While the parlor, dining room, hall, and stairs serve as havens of propagation and perpetuation of the Fairchild identity, the library stands as a memorial to the dead Fairchilds. Laura heads for the library in search of isolation, but what she finds frightens her a bit. As she makes her way through the library, she comes to realize the number of dead faces that stare at her from paintings and photographs. In this room are paintings of both Great-Great-Uncle Denis and Great-Great-Uncle Battle as well as small photographs of Ellen's mother, Ellen, and "the three brothers and the husbands of Aunt Mac and Aunt Shannon" (143). The library serves more as a mausoleum than a place for quiet reading. The only obvious omissions of the faces of "dead young Fairchilds" are the siblings of the current adult generation – Denis, Rowena, and Annie Laurie, Laura's mother. Laura notes that "no matter what hide-and-seek went on here, in this room where so many dead young Fairchilds, ruined people, were, there seemed to be always consciousness of their gazes, so courteous and meditative they were" (143). These dead Fairchilds never looked down in condescension but out over the room as if in pride. Their pride, on display in the library, mirrors the pride that the Fairchild family holds as the prominent family in this Delta town. It is an identity of pride and courtesy that the family memorializes along with these "dead young Fairchilds" in the library.

Laura enters the library to find George standing in front of the mantle lost in thought. Even George is described as "rearing tall" (143) as if he too were merely a statue – a companion piece to the painting of Great-Great-Uncle Battle on his horse. George's penetrating gaze at Laura mirrors the gazes of the dead Fairchilds in the paintings and pictures and frightens Laura, yet "[t]here was nothing abstract in Uncle George's look, like the abstraction of painted people, of most interrupted real people" (143-4). These images are the only remainders of individual family members long since dead, and each painting or photograph brings with it memories or

stories of the Fairchild past with which the people in the pictures seem preoccupied, as if pondering the family's nature. Laura questions whether or not the painting of Great-Great-Uncle Battle matches the face of a man who was murdered (143); she too cannot look at the paintings in the room without conjuring up old family stories. The seriousness of George's gaze matching the gazes of the dead Fairchilds that clutter the library alarms Laura, and she backs out of the library, the hall, and the house.

The Fairchild homes serve as places to honor their family history, memorialize ancestors, and instill in the children raised there a family identity of pride, privilege, courtesy, and what they see as proper decorum. The home provides the reader with a deeper understanding of the family's history, solidarity, and identity. When taken as a whole and not as individuals, Shellmound and the Fairchild family appear to be an ideal model of a twentieth century version of the Old South.

The Fairchild family and their homes are not the only ones in the novel; Welty also allows the reader to see also into the homes of the African-American characters. When Shelley, Laura, and India visit the mysterious conjurer Partheny's place in Brunswick-town where all of the African-Americans who work at Shellmound live, they get a sense of what home means for Partheny. The following passage is lengthy but necessary in order to fully understand the meaning of home to the African-American characters living in Brunswick-town.

> Brunswick-town lay all around them, dead quiet except for the long, unsettling cries of hens walking around, and the whirr of pigeons now and then overhead. Only the old women were home. The little houses were many and alike, all whitewashed with a green door, with stove-pipes crooked like elbows of hips behind, okra, princess-feathers, and false dragonhead growing around them, and

> China trees over them like umbrellas. . . . It was shady like a creek bed. The smell of scalding water, feathers, and iron pots mixed with the smells of darkness. Here, where no grass was let to grow on the flat earth that was bare like their feet, the old women had it shady, secret, lazy, and cool. A devious, invisible vine of talk seemed to grow from shady porch to shady porch, though all the old women were hidden. The alleys went like tunnels under the chinaberry branches, and the pony cart rocked over their black roots. Wood smoke drifted and hung in the trees like a low and fragrant sky. (216-7)

Though the community looks abandoned, the Fairchild girls are able to see evidence of life in the black community. They smell signs of cleaning in the scalding water and of voodoo concoctions (what the narrator refers to as darkness) in the iron pots and feathers. As the narrator (third person omniscient at this point in the novel) describes Brunswick-town and its community as a whole, the reader is made to understand the meaning of home to all of the African-American characters living in Brunswick-town: "the old women had it shady, secret, lazy, and cool" and "an invisible vine of talk seemed to grow" between the now empty porches of the community with its unique flowers, trees, and fragrant wood fires.

More specifically, the narrator gives detail about Partheny's home. Though that detail is limited, the reader can still gain insight from the identity revealed within the home. When Shelley, Laura, and India knock on Partheny's door, they back down the steps, and the narrator points out that Partheny, without rushing, "came out and stood on the porch above them" (217). It is worth noting that Partheny does not immediately invite them in but remains on the porch, her taller-than-a-man frame standing over them as Shelley (speaking "very politely") invites Partheny to Dabney's wedding and asks the impervious woman, who has special "powers" about

a lost garnet pin. Although a small and modest structure, the cabin is a home, and it is Partheny's, and the girls must wait for Partheny to come to the door and invite them in. Philosopher Alain de Botton points out, "We need a home in the psychological sense as much as we need one in the physical: to compensate for a vulnerability. We need a refuge to shore up our states of mind, because so much of the world is opposed to our allegiances. We need our rooms to align us to desirable versions of ourselves and to keep alive the important, evanescent sides of us" (107). Partheny's home provides a place – maybe the only place – where she possesses a powerful identity, and once empowered by this identity, she can stand without bowing to the conventions of racial inequality that were prevalent in the Delta. Her home provides her the psychological identity and physical ability to overcome the vulnerability resulting from her racial status and to stand over the white plantation owner's children. After Partheny allows the girls into the house, she begins "playing-like looking for" the pin (218). Partheny entertains the question of the pin's whereabouts, but she does so in a way that scoffs at the implications of the asking. Not one of the girls is fooled into believing that Partheny is *actually* looking for the pin, and she knows this. The narrator's description is almost comical: "Partheny looked, patting the bed quilt and tapping the fireplace, and then disappearing into the other room where they could hear her making little sympathetic, sorrowful noises, and a noise like looking under a dishpan" (218). Ellen's garnet pin is not going to miraculously show up when Partheny pats the bed quilt or taps the fireplace, and the fact that she looks under a dishpan makes clear the ridiculousness of Partheny's "playing-like looking for" the pin. She participates in the pretense rather than refusing to accept their challenge. Partheny, within the confines of her home, can act in a manner that clearly scorns the Fairchilds and the absurdity of their question.

It is also in her home that Partheny feels bold enough to interfere with the happenings of the Fairchilds. She makes George a voodoo cake that is supposed to bring Robbie Reid back to him, and when she gives it to the girls, the narrator points out that she gives "them all a look of malignity, pride, authority – the way the old nurse looked a hundred times intensified, it seemed" (220). The presence of Partheny's identity in her home and her authority over its visitors is clearly seen by the girls and intensifies her typical look "a hundred times" (220). Partheny's home empowers her and clearly holds emotional and psychological meaning for her. Partheny's identity is intertwined with the identity of her cabin and her extended home of Brunswick-town. By allowing the reader into Partheny's home, Welty reveals the crack that has begun to form in the accepted racial patterns of Fairchilds, and the Mississippi Delta as a whole. Though while in Shellmound, Partheny dutifully fulfills her role as house maid, in her home, she displays a feeling of empowerment and makes that power clear to the Fairchild girls.

While the Fairchild homes and the Brunswick-town homes are physical structures, a home does not have to be confined to a physical structure – a building. Robbie Reid, though trying to make a home in Memphis, ultimately realizes that her home is in George. As noted in the introduction, a home may be a person. In Tennessee Williams' "Night of the Iguana," Hannah sees her grandfather as her home; she says,

> We make a home for each other, my grandfather and I. Do you know what I mean by a home? I don't mean a regular home. I mean I don't mean what other people mean when they speak of a home, because I don't regard a home as a … well, as a place, a building … a house … of wood, bricks, stone. I think of homes as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can … well, nest – rest – live in, emotionally speaking. (qtd in Tuan 139)

Similarly, Robbie Reid nests in George. Her accusation regarding George's dangerous heroics on a railroad trestle to save the afflicted child Maureen is, "George Fairchild, you didn't do this for *me*!" (149) and shows that in that moment Robbie realizes that *she* is not *George's* home – the Fairchilds are. Shelley, when remembering the trestle incident, "felt that George and Robbie had hurt each other in a way so deep, so unyielding" (177). In the typescript of *Delta Wedding*, Welty had written the following:

> There had been a scene in the dining room last time – before Robbie left, leading up to Dabney's telling them she was engaged. That was supper. They had been eating the last three or four watermelons from Howard's field; the big eaten-out boats stood rocking over the table when George jumped up. In the first place the men had come home without any fish, and in the second place they had laughed at Robbie for taking such great offense at George – it looked put-on, and George had jumped up and blazed into anger at them. It was that trestle commotion. When George was angry, things truly went badly and left them at a loss, it was like a boat turning over on a river on a fine day; you had forgotten that a boat by its nature could do that. Luckily, Jim Allen had had a summer cold, but Primrose was here, and Battle jumped on her feelings so that she had to be especially persuaded to come up ever since; Primrose had taken Robbie's side and said, "Now aren't you ashamed, George, being so reckless in front of your wife!" and Battle had said that was the most absurd reason for George's being ashamed he had ever heard of, while he obviously thought the whole to-do absurd because he thought George's marriage absurd in the first place. Nobody could be happy for days afterward – that was what a scene did. Much special cooking went on in the

> kitchen to make things a little better, Roxie outdid herself. One day Ranny hurt his lip piteously and that fixed things somewhat – it melted Battle. (TS 148-9)

While this scene provides more insight into the fallout of the trestle incident, Welty chose to omit it. The scene shows cracks in the cohesive Fairchild identity and weakens the understanding of the family as a singular unit. Primrose taking Robbie's side *and* implying that George should have placed his wife in greater regard than the sole descendent of the heroic Denis Fairchild goes against the over-arching feeling of family unity that Welty has made prevalent throughout the family's time in their homes. A divisive scene of this sort would never happen in the dining room at Shellmound – a room where the collective Fairchild identity is so evident. Later in the novel when Robbie Reid does finally make her scene, she confronts the family in the dining room; however, the Fairchilds are not divided – they stand together as a whole in opposition to Robbie and her outburst. Ultimately, Robbie is hurt that George does not find home in her, and George is hurt that she does not realize that his home is as part of the Fairchild clan. It is because of this realization that Robbie leaves George and returns to her sister in the town of Fairchilds.

Robbie had worked tirelessly to make their flat in Memphis a place that she and George could call home – a place that would make George abandon Shellmound, The Grove, and the Fairchilds. She hoped he would find a home with her and in her the way she has found a home with and in him. She thinks about their apartment in Memphis and about what a great job she's done creating a suitable home for George:

> The flat in Memphis had heavy face-brick pillars and poured-cement ornamental fern boxes across a red tile porch. … The furniture was all bought in Memphis, shiny mahogany and rich velvet upholstery … There were soft pillows with golden tassels … Two of the chairs were rockers to match the davenport and there

> were two tables – matching. The lamps matched, being of turned mahogany, and there were two tall ones and two short ones, all with shades of mauve georgette over rose China silk. On the mantel, which was large and handsome made of red brick, was a mahogany clock, very expensive and ticking very slowly. The candles in heavy wrought-iron holders on each side had gilt trimming and were too pretty to be lighted. There were several Chinese ash trays about. … the rugs were both very fine … The black wrought-iron fire screen, andirons and poker set were the finest in Memphis. Every door was a French door, the floors were hardwood, highly waxed, yellow. (227-8)

Robbie continues ad nauseam about the extravagance of their flat. She seems to think that these expensive possessions will make George forget about his home in the Delta and allow him to make a home with her. What she does not see is that none of these things hold any emotional significance – they hold no memories or personal connection. They were bought in Memphis, not handed down from previous generations or given as gifts by loved ones. Robbie and George are unable to find a shared identity with the flat in Memphis, thus making it a failed home, and it is no more a home for Robbie than it is for George. While she lists the beautiful things she has bought for the flat, they do not carry significance for her either. Robbie seems to miss most the times she shared with George in Memphis and holds them as most significant. As she's describing the things in the flat, she gets most excited about George's pipe (228). She also mentions lying together on the couch listening to the bands play below (228) and the intimate moments of lying next to George in bed while he slept (237). No matter how much Robbie tries to make a home out of the Memphis apartment, however, her efforts fail. The narrator explains, "[S]he was glad there was nothing at all, no existence in the world, beyond George asleep, this

real and forgetful and exacting body" (195). Robbie also tells George, "You're everything on earth to me" (276). Her home is located in George, and what she realizes as the novel progresses is that as long as George is near her, she is home.

Ultimately, Robbie longs for George to feel the same and find a home in her. She has moments when she believes George does this; at one point, she thinks, "It was he who was lost, without her, a Fairchild man, lost at Shellmound" (238). At the wedding, Welty uses a house image to describe the love shared between George and Robbie. Welty writes, "But he turned his head a little now and glanced at her with the suddenness – curiosity, not quite hope – that tore her heart, like a stranger inside some house where he wanted to make sure that she too had come, had really come" (302). Whatever house George occupies, he wants Robbie there with him. While he never comes to a point where she alone is enough for him, he makes clear that he wants Robbie there to make wherever he is a home. Robbie reiterates this when she says, "Somehow it was all right, every minute that they were in the one place" (302). Both Robbie and George have come to a realization that as long as they are together, they are home. Tuan believes that a home in a person is not dependable or lasting (140), but Robbie and George do not need it to last. They need it to last only until they can find a dwelling with which they can identify in order to make it their home. By the end of the novel, Robbie has come to this realization, and she is willing to give up her life in Memphis – even though she admits lackadaisically that she would not like to do so – and move back to the Delta, back to the beginning of the Fairchild identity, back to The Grove. "The Grove? Robbie was thinking. Well, for her, it would be that once more they would laugh and chase by the river. Once more she and Mary Shannon … would be looking at each other in that house. Things almost never happened, almost never could be, for one time only! They went back again … started over …" (333). Things do indeed start over again. Robbie

accepts the idea of embracing the Fairchild identity and raising her child in a home that represents that Fairchild identity. Though the conversation about George and Robbie moving to The Grove seems to be in jest, its revelations about Robbie's willingness to embrace the Fairchild identity by living in a Fairchild home should not be taken lightly. She reaches a point where she can accept a compromise of identities between Robbie Reid and Mrs. George Fairchild – the wife of the family hero.

The homes in Delta Wedding serve as indicators of family history, personal empowerment, solidarity, and family identity. Analyzing the shared identity between these homes and their inhabitants reveals what the Fairchilds see as their family identity. However, it also highlights challenges to that identity. Laura's rebuff of the Fairchild identity, Partheny's display of power within her own home, and Robbie Reid's refusal to quietly integrate into her husband's family all present challenges to the continuation of the Fairchild collective identity. Looking closely at the homes in the novel begins to unveil the cracks in the seemingly ideal family life of the Fairchilds within their beautiful plantation home.

Unlike the Fairchilds, the McKelva family of *The Optimist's Daughter* has only one home they all shared – the one on Main Street in Mount Salus. However, that is not the only home mentioned in the novel. Becky, the protagonist's mother, considers West Virginia her primary home, but her husband Clint McKelva's connection to his childhood home is made evident by his devoting himself to flood control after the home flooded (955). Their daughter and the protagonist of the novel, Laurel, after leaving Mount Salus, has made a home in Chicago.[21] However, the two homes where the reader most clearly sees a shared identity between the home and the characters are in Laurel's shared identity with the McKelva home and Becky's shared identity with "up home" in West Virginia where she came from, a place rich with life and stories.

While the novel states quite clearly that the McKelva house now belongs to the young step-mother Fay, Laurel, not Fay, has the emotional ties to the home. Though Laurel does not visit frequently, her attachment to the McKelva home clearly shows through her actions and thoughts as she passes the days following her father's death. The McKelva home, the one in which Laurel was born and raised, has remained a place of safety, solace, and love throughout her life. Bachelard states, "We know perfectly that we feel calmer and more confident when in the old home, in the house we were born in, than we do in the houses on streets where we have only lived as transients" (43). Laurel comes home after her father dies in New Orleans and seeks the home of calm confidence that she thinks Clint, Becky, and she built together on Main Street in Mount Salus, Mississippi. In her mind the McKelva family shares the identity of safety, comfort, and love in a common bend with place. The contradictions she discovers in her parents' feelings, as well as in stories by her father's old friends, challenge her expectations. Bachelard dedicates an entire chapter in *The Poetics of Space* explaining the importance of the shell image when considering the perception of places and space. He explains that though the image is often dismissed as a child-like image of wonder, it should not be ignored because of its over-use or simplicity. Bachelard writes that the image of the shell-house "is too simple to be elaborated felicitously and too old to be rejuvenated. It says what it has to say in a single word. But the fact remains that it is a *primal image* as well as an indestructible one" (121). Though simple and seemingly contrite, the shell-house hits on the fundamental desire for a home. When Laurel returns to Mount Salus, she believes that her nuclear family has built a life of safety, comfort, and love, which are essential for the shell-house. These are also essential for making an ordinary place into a home. What Laurel finds during her time in Mount Salus threatens her idea of a

shell-house and forces her to wrestle with the true meaning of home and how she identifies with it.[22]

The idea of a shared identity between the McKelva home and the McKelva family appears throughout the novel, but a few intimate moments of Laurel's thoughts highlight the concept. The first instance occurs on Laurel's first night in Mount Salus after her father's death. This is the first time Laurel returns to the town and house since her father's wedding to the former stenographer Fay. It is the first time that she sleeps in her bedroom while Fay sleeps in Laurel's parents' bed, and it is Laurel's first night in the home as an orphan. Once the guests leave, Laurel crawls into bed and remembers the comfort and safety she has always felt in this bed, in this house. Her memory is indicative of the memories that have turned a simple, two-story house into a home of protection and love.

> When Laurel was a child, in this room and in this bed where she lay now, she closed her eyes like this and the rhythmic, nighttime sound of the two beloved reading voices came rising in turn up the stairs every night to reach her. She could hardly fall asleep, she tried to keep awake, for pleasure. She cared for her own books, but she cared more for theirs, which meant their voices. In the lateness of the night, their two voices reading to each other where she could hear them, never letting a silence divide or interrupt them, combined into one unceasing voice and wrapped her around as she listened, as still as if she were asleep. She was sent to sleep under a velvety cloak of words, richly patterned and stitched with gold, straight out of a fairy tale, while they went reading on into her dreams. (916-7)

But after returning to Mount Salus from New Orleans, the feeling of security and comfort she remembered (and probably expected) from lying in bed has changed. Now, with both parents

dead, Laurel lies sleeplessly in the bed; without the voices of her parents to calm, comfort, and coax her to sleep, Laurel chooses another familiar sound in hopes of recapturing the lost voices. She lies expectantly, listening for the striking of the mantel clock which never comes, for no one has wound it (917). It is as if the heart of the house has stopped, and Laurel, who has lost her own husband in World War II and lives alone in Chicago, cannot recapture the secure sense of family with which she grew up.

In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty writes of a similar story. Welty recalls lying in bed listening to her parents talk (as opposed to the reading voices of Clint and Becky). However, the sentiment is the same. Welty explains that this listening gave her "the secure sense of the hidden observer" (*Stories* 862). She says, "What I felt was not that I was excluded from them but that I was included, in – and because of – what I could hear of their voices . . ." (*Stories* 862). As a child, Laurel too must have felt the same inclusion and security as Welty. Laurel's ability to hear her parents included her in the shared moment. The intimate moments of her parents become her intimate moments with them because of her role as observer (whether hidden or seen). Her security lies in the nuclear family, together in this home.

Toward the end of the novel, after Fay leaves for Texas and Laurel has the house to herself, the reader sees Laurel remembering once again how her parents read and the comfort that reading brought her. She wanders into her father's office. She looks at her parents' books and thinks:

> Shoulder to shoulder they had long since made their own family. For every book here she had heard their voices, father's and mother's. And perhaps it didn't matter to them, not always, what they read aloud; it was the breath of life flowing between them, and the words of the moment riding on it that held them in delight.

> Between some two people every word is beautiful, or might as well be beautiful. (955).

Clint and Becky had made a family and home, and (to Laurel, at least) "shoulder to shoulder" they formed a protective barrier behind which they were able to live and love each other. Laurel basked in this protected environment, but as an adult she chose to leave it. Twice now in the novel she has seen other, different examples of family: the eccentric Dalzells in the New Orleans hospital and the equally large family that comes to comfort Fay (who has denied their existence). In both of these examples of large families, Laurel sees strained and complicated family relations that she believes did not exist in her small family. Laurel, who has chosen to live her adult life as a fabrics designer in Chicago away from her family and Mount Salus, sees no correlation between herself and Archie Lee Dalzell, who left home so long ago his father does not know he is alive, or Fay, who chose to move away from her family in Texas to be a stenographer. Instead of focusing on the physical distance between them, Laurel concentrates on the emotional closeness she feels with her parents. She dismisses any sign of discord that may have existed in her family and focuses on the beautiful voices of her parents.

Laurel's home was built from within. It is not the actual make-up of the physical house that matters or shelters her; it is the emotional home created by her observations of her parents interacting with each other and by their interactions with her. The voices and love of her family are what built this home. The house merely provided a setting. Much like Welty's observations of how setting pins down a story (*Stories* 793), the McKelva home pins down the security, comfort, memory, and love shared by Laurel and her parents, and over time, the home has become synonymous of those things to Laurel – so much so that not until her last morning in Mount Salus is she able to differentiate between the two.

Without her parents in the home, Laurel senses a change in the home's identity. Hoping to hold on to the identity she shared with her home and parents, Laurel searches for pieces of her mother and father in the home. After Laurel looks at the books on the shelves and thinks of the voices of her parents, she enters the library, the place "where, after his retirement and marriage, her father had moved everything he wanted around him" (954). This room, more than any other room in the house, represents her father, and Laurel probes it for the meaning of family. In this room are McKelva family heirlooms, her parents' books, her father's papers about the Big Flood that destroyed his childhood home, his school dedication speech, and other traces of his life as a young man, mayor, and judge. What is not in this room are reminders of her mother. The letters Becky wrote Clint, when one or the other was away on business or to see family, are nowhere to be found (957). Laurel had hoped for the letters even though she believed they had been immediately thrown away upon their reading: "Laurel had seen him do it" (957). Also, the photograph of her mother that had always sat on the desk had been replaced with one of Laurel and Phil on their wedding day (956-7). Laurel understands this replacement; Fay would not have approved or allowed the photograph to stay. After spending some time in the library, Laurel knows "there was nothing of her mother here for Fay to find, or for herself to retrieve" (957). The lack of presence of her mother in her father's library had to be disturbing for Laurel. However, Laurel had to know that just as Becky's photograph was not replaced with one of Fay, Judge McKelva's love for Fay had not replaced his love for Becky. She knows (as her last words to her father prove) her father loved her mother dearly, but the library provides no evidence of this love.

Upon returning from a night with the "bridesmaids," the group of childhood friends who had also participated in her wedding, Laurel finds a bird loose in the house. As a storm brews

outside, “Laurel, still in her coat, ran through the house, turning on the lights in every room, shutting the windows against the rain, closing the doors into the hall everywhere behind her against the bird” (962). The bird had infiltrated the main part of the house, but Laurel refuses to allow it into the inner rooms of the house. Once she runs upstairs, she shuts the door to her bedroom denying the bird access to the bedroom where as a child she would lie and hear the reading voices of her parents. However, shutting this door against the bird also shut it against herself. She had kept herself out of the room as much as the bird. Continuing to run from the bird, she moves lastly into her parents’ bedroom, and she slams the door ,keeping out the bird and locking in herself (962). “It could not get in here” (962), she thinks, not the room where her mother had given birth to her, where her father and mother had lain in bed reading aloud, and where her mother had died. And with the storm raging outside and the bird beating against the bedroom door, Laurel still must ask herself, “What am I in danger of here? (962).

There are two ways that question can be read. One way is seeing the question as rhetorical and emphasizing the *here*. The rhetorical answer is that she has nothing to fear within the safety of her parents’ room. However, if the sentence is read as a true question with a not-yet-realized answer, what she has perhaps misinterpreted is the fear that she is in danger of losing her home. The storms of emotion and loss have been raging since her father’s death, and her new, young step-mother Fay, like the bird, threatens to enter the emotional home Laurel has shared with her parents. The house is now Fay’s, but what Laurel has yet to realize is that Fay cannot own the *home* that Becky, Clint, and Laurel built as a family. Welty’s strategy with the bird – perhaps as negative an omen as Poe’s raven – is clearly to drive Laurel through the now empty home of her childhood in order for her to learn that “home” is not a house but the relationships

made there. The ties of home which the three created are not contained in the house on Main Street but live with Laurel in her memory.

There is a clear distinction present in the novel between house ownership and home ownership. Laurel, alone in the inner part of the home, "listened to the wind, the rain, the blundering, frantic bird, and wanted to cry out as the nurse in the New Orleans hospital [had] cried out to her, 'Abuse! Abuse!'" (962). In the same way that Fay abused her father in the hospital room, the storm and the bird are abusing her home of protection and love, and just as no one was able to stop Fay's abuse "in that shattering moment in the hospital" (963), Laurel has no help in warding off the shattering realization that threatens her sense of home. As Laurel's anger, frustration, and sadness increase, so do the beating of the storm winds and the trapped bird. Laurel stands in her parents' room mentally reeling from the events of the past few days, and "she heard the bird beating against the door, and felt the house itself shake in the rainy wind," and later, "She heard the bird drum itself against the door all its length from top to bottom" (963). The bird and storm send Laurel into the innermost room of the home, the "little room that opened out of [her parents' room]" (963), the sewing room that was the old nursery for Laurel in her infancy. Laurel thinks, "It was quieter here. It was around the corner from the wind, and a room away from the bird and the disturbed dark. It seemed as far from the rest of the house itself as Mount Salus was from Chicago" (964).

In entering the innermost room, Laurel not only retreats from the dangers of the world outside the room (both emotional and physical), but she also returns to the room where her life in the family began to be shaped. "Even before it had been the sewing room, it had been where she slept in infancy until she was old enough to move into her own room across the hall" (964). It is clear that in this inner room within the shell of protection of the home, Laurel feels intimately

close to her parents. As Bachelard writes, "The shell confers a daydream of purely physical intimacy" (131). When Laurel enters, the room is dark, cold, and cluttered with Becky's things – things of no use to Fay. This room, during the time Fay has lived in the house, has served more as an attic than a room. But that is not how Laurel remembers it. "[I]t had been warm here, warm then. . . . Firelight and warmth – that was what her memory gave her" (964). Despite the chill of abandonment and unuse and the cluttered furniture in the room, Laurel remembers "firelight and warmth" (964). Laurel remembers her father building a fire, her mother sewing, and herself as a child making things out of scraps of cloth. All three of them – father, mother, and daughter – were *creating* something and were creating something together. She recalls of her father, "Then he was young and could do everything" (964). She recalls of herself and mother at the sewing machine:

> When her mother . . . sat here in her chair pedaling and whirring, Laurel sat on this floor and put together the fallen scraps of cloth into stars, flowers, birds, people, or whatever she liked to call them, lining them up, spacing them out, making them into patterns, families, on the sweet-smelling matting, with the shine of firelight, or the summer light, moving over mother and child and what they both were making. (964)

However, the fire, the sewn piece of clothing, or the homemade material creations were not what are important to Laurel. For Laurel, this room, these memories, are of an almost primitive account of man, woman, and child creating and building a family (Laurel's childhood creation of material families mirrors the creation of her real family).

There had been nothing of her mother in her father's library, and there was little of her father in this small room. The reader later learns that even Becky's cookware had been neglected

and shut into the old wooden cabinet, and Fay had covered the bed previously shared by Clint and Becky in peach satin. Yet, in the sewing room – the *aedicula* of the McKelva home, Laurel finds touching evidence of her mother's existence in the secretary which contains the things most precious to Becky and the things that most remind Laurel of her mother. Laurel finds Becky's letters stowed safely in the twenty-six cubbyholes of the secretary. Unlike Welty who writes in *One Writer's Beginnings* about coming to know her father through his letters to her mother (*Stories* 918), Laurel takes down letters from her father, confirms what they are, and puts them back in their place without reading them (965). Laurel has only one more night in her home, and her attentions must be focused on finding answers to her questions. Bachelard believes, "A creature that hides and 'withdraws into its shell,' is preparing a 'way out'" (111). Laurel knows she will leave the next day, and she must figure out a way to leave Mount Salus and this house without losing the home she and her parents built. Laurel does not doubt her parents' love for each other, and reading their letters would only confirm what she already knows. Laurel searches for something else. Laurel has seen her father's grief; she saw him mourn her mother. However, Laurel knows little of her mother's grief. Through reading her mother's letters, she comes to understand the occasions of her mother's grief that, as familiar family stories heard again and again when Laurel was young, were just family stories. Now she experiences her mother's grief standing in a Baltimore hospital after her own father died when she was a young girl. She also now understands her mother's grief of leaving her West Virginian home, and of not being near when her mother (Laurel's grandmother) died years later. However, through comprehending her mother's grief, Laurel gains a clearer sense of her father's grief as her mother lay dying in their bed. As Laurel confronts her parents' grief, she longs to grieve not *over* them but *with* them. "In her need tonight Laurel would have been willing to wish her mother and father dragged back to

any torment of living because that torment was something they had known together, through each other. She wanted them with her to share her grief as she had been the sharer of theirs" (975).

In wanting to grieve with her parents, Laurel begins to think of her role in the grief each felt. She feels guilty for not understanding her father's grief over her mother's rapidly declining health: "When someone lies sick and troubled for five years and is beloved, unforeseen partisanship can spring up among the well. During her mother's long trial in bed, Laurel, young and recently widowed, had somehow turned for a while against her father: he seemed so particularly helpless to do anything for his wife" (973). Now Laurel's recollections give her understanding of her father's helplessness in easing Becky's pain and in trying to save her life, and Laurel realizes that Clint's helplessness led to Becky's desperation. Laurel's memories of her mother's slow death and her father's grief helplessly watching the decline could easily have made Laurel bitter and angry. Yet Laurel now does not dwell on her father's ineptitude and her mother's rants of fury; instead, "She sat and thought of one thing, of her mother holding and holding onto their hands, her own and her father's holding onto her mother's, long after there was nothing more to be said" (975).

After continuing to look over her mother's papers, Laurel cries (for the first time in the narrative). Welty writes, "She let the papers slide from her hand and the books from her knees, and put her head down on the open lid of the desk and wept in grief for love and for the dead. She lay there with all that was adamant in her yielding to this night, yielding at last." (977). Alone in the innermost room of the house where she was born, Laurel finally begins the grieving over lost love and loved ones that helps her understand her "home." Through retreating as deeply as possible into her home, Laurel re-encounters her parents through her mother's papers and her

own now transformed memories. Welty writes, “Now all she had found had found her” (977). This mature understanding of her parents heightens her grief over the loss of the example of their love for each other and for her. It also reveals to Laurel the whole of the home her parents built and the identity she and her parents shared with the home as she embraced the home feeling that grew there. With both parents dead, the home on Main Street in Mount Salus is the only place where Laurel can rediscover her parents’ voices, love, and grief. The McKelva home is not simply setting; it is a necessary element to provide Laurel with the reminders of her parents and the space in which to rediscover them.

The McKelva home is not the only home discussed in great detail in the novel. Throughout her life, Becky never let go of the feeling that her real home was in West Virginia. Though the story of *The Optimist’s Daughter* is told mostly through a third-person narrator, the limited focus is Laurel’s perspective, and it is clear that Laurel’s understanding of “up home” came through her mother Becky’s love for her childhood home, the memories mother and child shared while there, and the stories Becky has told Laurel. Laurel remembers the West Virginia house “was built on top of what might as well have been already the highest roof in the world. There were rocking chairs outside it on the sweet, roofless green grass. From a rocking chair could be seen the river where it rounded the foot of the mountain” (967). But the narrator’s description of “up home” does not solely focus on the physical structure of the Thurston house or the possessions contained inside, instead it focuses on the memories and interactions between her mother’s family members. According to Dovey, “Home is a place where our identity is continually evoked through connections with the past” (42). For Becky, this is definitely the case. Her identity is tied up in her memories of “up home.” The reader sees this as Laurel

remembers two distinct periods in Becky's life: during her younger years when Laurel was a child and even during the later years when her mother's health and spirits had deteriorated.

During her younger and healthier years, Becky traveled home to West Virginia every summer, and most times, she took Laurel with her. Even before then, she named Laurel after her home state's official flower. Both of these intertwine in the young, married Becky's life with her West Virginia home. Laurel's remembrances of her mother and her mother's West Virginian home are composed of a mixture of her mother's stories and observing her mother on her trips "up home." When Becky talked about her home, she spoke with gravity (966). She told Laurel about her days as a school teacher and how she rode her horse, Selim, every day to and from school. Becky told Laurel a great deal about the details of her young life at home, even to the point of taking care to make sure Laurel pronounced Selim's name correctly. Laurel remembers Becky telling her:

> Up home, we loved a good storm coming, we'd fly outdoors and run up and down to meet it. … We children would run as fast as we could go along the top of that mountain when the wind was blowing, holding our arms wide open. The wilder it blew the better we liked it. (971)

Becky tells Laurel about her love for storms after half of Mount Salus is destroyed by a tornado. Becky never acknowledges that tornadoes are more common in Mississippi than West Virginia – explaining why West Virginians would not be as scared of storms as Mississippians were. She embraces the storms and dismisses with a sense of superiority those who fear them. Laurel's memory of her mother's calm demeanor during storms in fact comforts Laurel during her last night in Mount Salus.

When they took their annual trips to West Virginia, Laurel observed as her mother and uncles would ride down to the apple tree and sit to tell stories while the four brothers played the banjo. The narrator points out that these were stories "all about people only [Becky] knew and they knew" (968). These were not people Laurel or Judge McKelva knew. Laurel remembers Becky would laugh until she cried over these stories. But Laurel does not share any of these stories for the reader because to her, the stories themselves do not matter. They reveal Becky's ties to *her* home and its people. Becky's identity and happiness at her childhood home are evident in her demeanor while she is in West Virginia. What Laurel remembers is her own experience: "Sometimes the top of the mountain was higher than the flying birds. Sometimes even clouds lay down the hill, hiding the treetops farther down. The highest house, the deepest well, the tuning of the strings; sleep in the clouds; Queen's Shoals; the fastest conversations on earth – no wonder her mother needed nothing else!" (969). Her annual trips "up home" with her mother showed Laurel what Becky loves about the place. Laurel remembers Becky as happiest when she is in West Virginia: "'Up home,' just as Laurel was in Mount Salus, her mother was too happy to know what went on in the outside world" (969). Laurel is able to see and understand exactly why her mother loves her home and why it is such an important part of who Becky is. Laurel also recalls how she, her mother, and grandmother would all sit outside of the house watching the sun go down and waiting for the brothers to come home (968).

Laurel's most vivid memory of her time "up home" with her mother seems to involve her grandmother's pigeons. Laurel's last night in Mount Salus, when she hears the beating of the bird's wings outside the sewing room, she remembers the pigeons. The way in which the pigeons fed themselves horrified Laurel as a child. She feared the birds and hoped her grandmother would protect her from them. The narrator explains:

> Laurel had kept the pigeons under eye in their pigeon house and had already seen a pair of them sticking their beaks down each other's throats, gagging each other, eating out of each other's craws, swallowing down all over again what had been swallowed before: they were taking turns. The first time, she hoped they might never do it again, but they did it again the next day while the other pigeons copied them. They convinced her that they could not escape each other and could not themselves be escaped from. (969)

These pigeons and Laurel's observation of them speak to more than just hungry pigeons feeding one another. Much like the pigeons, Becky's stories of up home are pulled from various family members, devoured, and regurgitated in the retelling. Becky needs to hear, enjoy, and retell these stories from home just as much as the pigeons need the nutrients from the food they eat. They provided comfort to Becky when she could no longer visit; through the stories, Becky travels back home to the place and people she loves. On her last night in Mount Salus, Laurel, too, uses the stories to mentally travel back to her grandmother's house and to her mother's happy and healthy younger years. The image of the pigeons corresponds to the grief Laurel feels. That night in her mother's sewing room, she wishes she could drag her mother and father back from death much like the pigeons pull food from one craw into their own. While she is unable to pull either parent back, she does resurrect their grieving. She remembers her mother's grief over not being "up home" when her mother died.

She also wrestles with the grief felt by both Becky and Clint while Becky lay in bed slowly dying, a time when the ties to her West Virginia home become stronger. Before Becky's first surgery, her hopefulness could be seen in the makeup on her face and the perfume she sprayed before being carried off to surgery: "She had stretched out her hand in exhilaration… as

if after Nate Courtland had removed that little cataract in the Mount Salus Hospital, she would wake up and be in West Virginia" (972). Becky is excited about the prospects of better health and sight that surgery would bring, and it reminds Laurel of the excitement Becky felt when up home in West Virginia. The excitement slowly waned as the years passed and Becky's health left her in bed more and more. The anticipated success of the first surgery would allow Becky more trips "up home," but as Becky's health declined, so too did her hopes and chances of going back to West Virginia.

During Becky's sickness, she continually talks of her life "up home" and not of the life she and Clint have built in Mount Salus. Holding her own hands up to her eyes, she remembers her mother's hands and how they bled from the cold (975). As she lies in bed, unable to read, she recites to herself "The Cataract of Lodore" from McGuffey's Fifth Reader just as she did during her days as a teacher in West Virginia. The *cataract* in the poem is a waterfall rather than the cataract in her eye that was the beginning of Becky McKelva's physical and emotional decline. The poem uses words of action to describe the waterfall at the center of the poem, and Becky does not recite the beginning of the poem which puts these words in context; she instead recites the more active passages – describing with verbs the power of Lodore. Becky's sight had failed her, and a different poem from her childhood would not have carried the same weight as "The Cataract of Lodore" does. It is not the lost sight that bothers Becky; it is the lost action of her life that has tied her down. Becky quotes her father to Clint and Laurel "If they try to hold me, I'll die" (970). Becky's sickness is what holds her; she is unable to live her life, to love her family, to do the things that have made her happy her entire life, and most painfully, she is unable to travel "up home." Unable to physically travel and unable to actively participate in her life, she travels mentally back to her youth in West Virginia.

By her last surgery, her demeanor has changed from excited to “reckless” and “wasted” (975). She would ask, “If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?” (970). Becky had lost her hopeful excitement and had lost contact with “up home.” The house in West Virginia had burned, her mother was dead, her annual trips “up home” had ceased, her brothers had moved down the mountain and into the towns to work; all sense of home was lost for Becky, and this loss left her reckless and wasted. Similarly, when the Presbyterian preacher comes to see Becky to give “spiritual guidance,” Becky tells him, “I’d like better than anything you can tell me just to see the mountain one more time” (974). She then tells him about the white strawberries that grew on the mountain in West Virginia. Becky explains,

> I could tell you this minute where to go, but I doubt if you’d see them growing after you got there. Deep in the woods, you’d miss them. You could find them by mistake, and you could line your hat with leaves and try to walk off with a hatful: that would be how little you knew about those berries. Once you’ve let them so much as touch each other, you’ve already done enough to finish ‘em. …You had to know enough to go where they are and stand and eat them on the spot, that’s all. (974)

Becky, lying on her death bed and nearly blind, wanted only to go home to West Virginia to see the mountains and to eat the strawberries that grow there. Of all the stories Becky could have told about her mountain home, why would she choose to tell the preacher about the strawberries? It is possible that Becky related her life and her current feeling with those strawberries. Clint McKelva did not pick Becky Thurston then stay in West Virginia to enjoy life with her. He took her away from the mountains and brought her to Mississippi to be in his home with him. Every year Becky went back home, the mountains rejuvenated her and reestablished her identity with

her home. However, once Becky is no longer healthy enough to travel back home to West Virginia, she loses her identity. Marrs writes of the correlation between Becky and Welty's own mother Chestina, "Mrs. Welty's idealization of her West Virginia origins was allied to the sense of self-sufficiency and self-reliance she could feel there. … That sense of self-reliance was a painful loss when Mrs. Welty found herself old and weak and blind" (One *Writer's Imagination* 231). Just like Mrs. Welty, Becky is left without her self-reliance and the feeling that home brought to her. Becky, without a sense of home, knows that her soul cannot be renewed without going back home – a home that at this point in her life no longer exists, even if she were well enough to go there.

By the bitter end, "After a stroke had crippled her further she had come to believe – that she had been taken somewhere that was neither home nor 'up home,' that she was left among strangers, for whom even anger meant nothing, on whom it would only be wasted. She had died without speaking a word, keeping everything to herself, in exile and humiliation" (975). Once Becky feels as if she has been exiled from both the home of her childhood and the home in which she raised her own child, she is left without any identity, and she dies without speaking. Clare Cooper Marcus believes "As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close affective ties with a number of significant physical environments" (4). If this is true, then our psychological deterioration can also be tied to a severance or lack of ties to significant physical environments. In Becky's younger days in Mount Salus, her mother in West Virginia would write to her "as an exile" (977) who had found a new home. Becky, so near death and believing she had been taken from both of her homes and left with strangers, once again feels exiled, but this time she is not exiled to a new home but to homelessness amongst strangers.

After her death, Becky's brother Sam (the youngest one and the one who threw himself on the ground crying when Becky got married) was her only family from "up home" who was able to come to the funeral. "He who had been the Evening Star climbed on two canes to her grave and said to Judge McKelva, as they stood together, 'She's a long way from West Virginia'" (976). Mississippi was a long way from West Virginia, but Sam, having not seen his sister in the despair and torments that came in the final years of her life, could not have imagined just how far from home Becky had felt in the end.

Both Becky and Laurel no longer live in the homes they consider their primary homes. However, this has not tainted or lessened the identities they both share with those primary homes. McDowell points out, "The house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin, carapace or second layer of clothes, it serves much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect" (93). This is clearly seen in the connections that Becky and Laurel have with their homes. Both Becky and Laurel see their homes as intimately linked to their own identities, and such a concept of home hides and protects them while revealing and displaying a greater depth to their characters.

In both Delta Wedding and The Optimist's Daughter, memory and place are boud together, as George Garrett says, "hopelessly entangled." Garrett enumerates "at least three kinds of memory – one is private, your own secret word hoard of facts and fiction; the second is public; and somewhere in between, but perhaps more powerful than both, lies family memory, what we can recall from the experience of kinfolk we know and have touched, those we have witnessed" (37). This is true for both the Fairchilds and the McKelvas. For the Fairchilds, the homes, primarily Shellmound and The Grove, are physical representations of the family identity

built upon traditions and history. For Laurel McKelva, home is her life with her parents, and the house on Main Street in Mount Salus has been indicative of their life together. The identity which the characters share with their respective homes is one that remains with them no matter how far from home they wander. By sharing an identity with the home, the characters get to experience "a more lasting identity" that Welty attributes to place (*Stories* 783).

CHAPTER TWO: THE SOCIAL IDENTITY

In an interview with Jean Todd Freeman, Welty responds to a question about whether or not the South is an element in her work. She explains at length:

> "I think Southerners have such an intimate sense of place. We grew up in the fact that we live here with people about whom we know almost everything that can be known as a citizen of the same neighborhood or town. We learn significant things that way: we know what the place has made of these people; what they've made of the place through generations. We have a sense of continuity and that, I think, comes from place. It helps to give the meaning – another meaning to a human life that such life has been there all the time and will go on." (*Conversations* 179-80)

Welty explains how people have a connection to place, but that connection is also with the other people who inhabit the place. Garrett points out, "When we summon up our place in the world we have to call up as well the people who live there" (45). While the characters and their homes share an identity, the homes also share an identity with the social fabric of the place in which the homes dwell. James Duncan, a social geographer, writes that "the house mirrors the social structure" (135). The social identity of a place is mirrored in the individual homes and by individual families. The home, its inhabitants, and the people that surround them are all closely related, and looking at these relations brings a greater understanding of the importance of the homes in the community and the community in the homes

Shellmound sits in the top, right-hand corner of Charles Alston's drawing on the inside cover of the 1946 edition of *Delta Wedding*. The home is away from town and the other Fairchild homes; there are fields and lakes separating Shellmound from both Brunswick-town (the closest in proximity from the south) and the railroad tracks (the closest in proximity to the west). In the

drawing Marmion appears equal in size to Shellmound, but Marmion is hidden in part by trees while Shellmound remains visible and prominent. Though Charles Alston, not Welty, drew the map of "The Delta Country," Alston, more than likely, read *Delta Wedding* before drawing the map.[23] McDowell points out, "In all societies … the home is much more than a physical structure. The house is the site of lived relationships, especially those of kinship and sexuality, and is a key link in the relationship between material culture and sociality: a concrete marker of social position" (92). Alston's map provides a pictorial reminder that Shellmound, the most prominent home in the town of Fairchilds, serves as a "concrete marker" of the Fairchilds' social status.

Alston's drawing highlights the prominence of the Fairchild home – the home beyond the physical structure – in the society of Fairchilds, Mississippi. According to Dovey, "The notion of home as social order is … embodied not in a house or building but in the patterning of experience and behavior" (38). It is in the home that individuals and families cultivate experiences and determine acceptable social behavior. The older members of the Fairchild family teach the younger members about socially acceptable patterns of experience and behavior. Battle sits at the head of the table (100), reinforcing his dominant position as the patriarch of the family. Ellen's refusal to send the candy dish back to Aunts Primrose and Jim Allen without something in it teaches her daughters that doing so is socially unacceptable (117) – one should never send back an empty dish. Battle refuses to provide Shelley with a lamp to put in her room for reading; he feels that reading should be done fully clothed and downstairs (171) because girls should not be reading alone and undressed in their bedrooms. Dabney takes Dickie Boy Featherstone, who is a more suitable date than her fiancé Troy Flavin because he is the appropriate age and social class, to the dances (114), and Laura is punished for calling Dr.

Murdoch a fool (240). The children are taught *in* the home about what is appropriate *outside* of the home.

Another way in which the home prepares the children for life beyond the home is in setting up appropriate gender roles. When Ellen takes Laura into the kitchen to help her bake Aunt Mashula's coconut cake, she is preparing her for life as a Fairchild woman. Ann Romines writes, "Welty shows how the execution of a recipe can be a tradition, a tribute (to both the past and the future; the cake is being baked for tomorrow's guests), and a way of thinking." (*Home Plot* 221-2). Ellen teaches Laura the traditions of women in the Fairchild family and, in so doing, pays tribute to these women who are Laura's ancestors. While in the novel the experience of baking the cake is seen from Ellen's point of view and the reader is taken into Ellen's thoughts, in the short story "Delta Cousins," Welty writes of Laura's feelings after she and Aunt Ellen bake the cake. The narrator points out, "When she came out of the kitchen she felt as if she might have just been born … again, out of the long task with Aunt Mim. It was like a secret Aunt Mim had told her in confidence, without words, the secret of women's work, and she liked it" ("Delta Cousins" 31). [24] Laura strongly feels that in teaching her how to bake Aunt Mashula's cake, Aunt Ellen has taught her the secret to womanhood.

Gender roles are also defined inside the home when Battle jokingly tells Ranny and Bluet that Dabney is never returning home after she marries. The two children begin crying. "Ranny burst into tears in the air, and so did Bluet out in the hall. Battle set the boy down in haste" (180). Battle commands the boy, "Stop crying, Ranny. ... Bluet can cry her eyes out if she wants to, because she's a girl, but you can't, or I'll take the switch to you promptly" (180). Battle quickly changes in mood from joking with his son and playfully tossing him into the air to putting him down on the ground quickly and scolding him. Battle's actions teach his son the socially

accepted rule that men (and boys) are not allowed to cry – a perceived sign of weakness. Men must be stoic and strong; women may cry all they want because they are weaker, and it is expected of them.

Not all adults in the novel agree on what constitutes socially accepted gender roles. In *Understanding Eudora Welty*, Kreyling writes, "From the theme of the competing demands of personal and communal identity, *Delta Wedding* merges into the complicated and crowded theme of male and female social and psychological roles" (100-01). The gender roles are complicated by the fact that few agree on what are the roles of males and females. Troy and Tempe stand at opposite sides when considering a woman's role in the home. Troy seems to adopt the more patriarchal idea that women belong in the home, working, and procreating. Dabney informs the reader, "Troy did venerate women – he thought Aunt Tempe should be home like his mammy, making a quilt or meditating words of wisdom" (274). Troy feels that a woman's place is in the home doing tasks necessary for comfort and survival. Tempe counters Troy's idea. She tells Dabney not to let Troy know she can cook in order to avoid having to cook for the rest of her life, and she complains about her son-in-law Mr. Buchanan's insistence that his wife and Tempe's daughter, Mary Denis, wash the windows daily. Tempe's views, it is worth remembering, are those of a woman who still attends dances while her husband spends his time away from her in Memphis. Romines describes Tempe and her thoughts on gender as, "both aging belle and overseeing aunt and grandmother, thinks of men, at best, as women's accomplices" (*Home Plot* 213). Tempe feels that men are idle and lazy but serve to aid women, and she dreams of "[a] paradise, in which men, sweating under their hats like field hands, chopped out difficulties like the green grass and made room for the ladies to flower out and flourish like cotton" (277). Tempe challenges a world in which women work while men do

nothing. It is interesting to note that the version of men's and women's roles in the Delta that Tempe challenges *is* the version that Welty chooses to present in the novel. With the exception of Tempe's husband Pinck, Troy, and the black servants, the men do not do any work. The black and white women, however, spend the vast majority of the novel cooking and cleaning in preparation for the wedding, and this is in addition to the other every-day domestic tasks the women do that are necessary for a Delta plantation to function. The Fairchild men (Denis and George specifically) are the ones venerated and worshiped, not the women.

Not only are there differing views among the characters on the role of gender in Delta society, there are also differing views on the ways in which gender roles define the Fairchilds. Laura believes the men and boys define the Fairchild family, and she says, "All the girls knew it" (102). She uses the terms "boys and men" to explain who defines the family, but she uses only the term "girls" (not women) when saying who knew this to be fact. The women seem to know *they* are the ones who define the Fairchilds – who, through their responsibilities to the home, are able to instill in the Fairchilds what behavior is appropriate for the family and the world outside the family. Robbie Reid feels that the Fairchild women inappropriately hold the power. She muses, "[I]n their kind of people, the Fairchild kind, the women always ruled the roost; Robbie believed in her soul that men should rule the roost. … It was notoriously the women of the Fairchilds who since the Civil War, or – who knew? – since the Indian times, ran the household and had everything at their fingertips" (233-4). The implications are interesting. If the women are controlling the home environment, and the home environment is a microcosm of the social environment outside the home, then women's power over the community may be stronger than these women (or their men) realize. Welty does not present a household for comparison with the Fairchilds, so it is not clear whether or not the Fairchilds are the only family where this is the

case. But, the reader should not assume, based on Robbie's comments, that the Fairchilds are the only family where the women hold the power in the home. Robbie, born to a social class beneath that of the Fairchilds, may have grown up in a home where there was a belief that "men should rule the roost," but it is possible that other upper-class homes were run much like the Fairchild homes – where women maintained control and power. Tempe further explains the way in which women define the Fairchild family when she tells Shelley, "[W]hen people marry beneath them, it's the woman that determines what comes. It's the woman that coarsens the man. The man doesn't really do much to the woman, I've observed" (293). Tempe's statement explains why Troy marrying Dabney will not change Dabney or her Fairchild characteristics, but it gives reasoning to Tempe's and her family's disdain for Robbie Reid. Women hold the power to manipulate men and children, and by this control, they shape what happens to the family's identity as seen by those outside of the family. Woman's place in the home gives her power over the acceptable practices, rituals and rules of the house, and these enter the social realm as visitors come into the house and as the family members go out.

In addition to gender roles, socially appropriate talk of gender relations is also something the children learn in the home. There is no talk of sex, and implications of sex are met with scorn. The aunts living at The Grove inform India, "Little girls don't talk about honeymoons. … They don't ask their sisters questions" (133). When Troy brings into the house the quilts from his mother, Aunt Tempe gives Ellen "a long look" after Troy says, "'Delectable Mountains,' that's the one I aim for Dabney and me to sleep under most generally, warm and pretty" (201). Merely mentioning sleeping in the same bed with Dabney brings out Tempe's disapproval. Perhaps Tempe should have directed her "long look" at Troy because he continues on, "Let her wait [to write a thank you note] till she tries them out, Mrs. Fairchild … That's what will count with

Mammy. She might come if we have a baby sure enough" (202). With this statement the unmarried Primrose pulls her hands away from the quilt as quickly as she can. Apparently little girls are not the only ones who are not supposed to talk about honeymoons or babies.

Not only does the home provide a place where social norms are taught and practiced in order to teach the children of the family and to enforce the socially accepted ways of a place, it serves as a reminder of the family's prominence and social standing. While hosting visitors, the family is able to display their wealth and reinforce their social prominence in the community. The dining room – the *aedicule* at Shellmound – is a perfect example of this. Gallagher points out that Henry Wordsworth Longfellow used his dining room as a place to show off his social status, and she explains that over time "[t]he dining room became more important and elaborate – and strongly associated with the ownership of fine things and the capacity to appreciate them" (96). The Fairchild's dining room clearly depicts this. As Laura sits at the dining room table and observes her family, the narrator begins to describe the possessions that the Fairchilds display. The narrator begins the description with "the old walnut-and-cane chairs (Great-Grandfather made them)" before describing anything else in the room. The narrator begins as if the chairs are the obvious place to begin because nothing in the room could be nearly as precious (106). However, the narrator points out that the room is a large one, and the table stands in the center of the room. Over the table hangs a lamp with a tinted glass shade. The china closets showcase the precious pieces of silver: candlesticks, a sugar basket, a collection of Apostle Spoons, and the epergne from Port Gibson (a piece Longfellow, according to Gallagher, also flaunted in his dining room). The room also contains several pieces of wicker furniture – very popular during the Victorian era (and were assumingly passed down from the previous generation). The easy chairs sound simple enough, but the narrator informs the reader that these chairs are covered in

cotton – the means through which the family gained its status and wealth. Lastly, the large mirror from which Laura watches her family recline hangs over the sideboard reflecting back the room's grandeur (as if seeing it twice would better convince a guest of the family's wealth and status). The philosopher William James says, "We are what we have," and "[p]ossessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities" (qtd. in Gallagher 100), and it appears the Fairchilds certainly agreed.

The wedding itself serves as a way for the Fairchilds to display their wealth and prominence. James C. Cobb writes in *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, "Delta planters exercised firm control of both the economy and the society of the Yazoo Mississippi Delta at the close of the 1920s" (124). With control of both the economy and the society, the Fairchilds are able to present an elaborate wedding unlike what most in the Delta can afford. The family orders the wedding dress, bridesmaids' dresses, shepherdess crooks, mints, the flowers, and the cake from Memphis (197). Dabney's wedding calls for goods that must be bought not only out of the Delta but out of Mississippi altogether. Ellen tells Shelley that Battle has paid thirty-five dollars for the wedding cake (289). A thirty-five dollar wedding cake in 1927 would be around $430 dollars today ("Inflation Calculator"). Most families in the Delta would not have been able to afford such a cake, and the Fairchilds' ability to do so showcases their wealth. Charles East points out,

> There was an air of superiority about Deltans that some of those in the North Mississippi hill country resented: all that rich land and the attitude to go with it. It manifested itself in the determination of Deltans to do things in style, to give their daughters a fancy wedding when they didn't know where their next crop was coming from, sometimes even (so the story goes) charging china and silver and

> crystal and God only knows what else and then returning it after the wedding. (56)

The Fairchilds have the means to pay for the fancy wedding, and in an environment where people "do things in style," the Fairchilds led the way.

Mary Denis Summers' wedding to Mr. Buchanan, as the last family wedding,[25] stands as the measure of extravagance; Dabney must top Mary Denis' wedding. When Dabney tells her aunts about her engagement and imminent wedding, they tell Dabney, "You're looking mighty pretty," and Aunt Primrose continues, "Did you feel this way about Mary Denis Summers, Jim Allen? I didn't" (126). How exactly they felt about either one of their nieces' marriages is unclear. Their statement could imply that they were not as happy for Mary Denis as they are for Dabney; it could also mean they did not feel the same level of shame that accompanies Dabney marrying the overseer when Mary Denis married a Yankee. However, Tempe, Mary Denis' mother, makes it very clear how she feels about Mary Denis' wedding. Once Tempe arrives, she boasts to Ellen, "Well, everybody says Mary Denis's wedding was the most outstanding that has ever occurred in our part of the Delta" (196). Tempe's statement reminds Ellen of the standards and expectations for a Fairchild wedding. When Ellen wonders if serving frozen tomato salad for the rehearsal dinner will be "a reproach on us" (197), Tempe responds that Mary Denis requested cold lobster aspic (197). The fact that Ellen asks whether or not the frozen tomato salad will be an embarrassment indicates her concern with portraying the appropriate Fairchild image to the public. Tempe's response passive-aggressively informs her that frozen tomato salad does not live up to the Fairchild standard. Whether the tomato salad does or not, it is clear that the Delta wedding as a whole lives up to the grandeur of the Fairchilds. The Memphis newspaper had asked for permission to attend the wedding, and Tempe had granted it. The "picture taker" from

the paper took two photos of the entire family while the reception guests arrived. The paper would not have asked to send a photographer to just any wedding; this would have been saved for the socially elite, for those weddings that would be more extravagant than typical. The narrator writes, "Everybody for miles around came to the reception. … Shelley's heart pounded as she smiled; indeed this was a grand occasion for everybody, their wedding was really eventful" (307). The wedding lived up to a celebration worthy of the Fairchilds, displaying for all the guests the family's wealth and importance.

However, the home is not solely a place to display one's wealth to guests; it is also a place to reinforce the family's status in the social realm. When Mr. Rondo comes to visit, at first Ellen tries to portray perfect wedded bliss for George and Robbie. Much like Tempe later in the novel, Ellen seems unsure what to tell the Delta, as represented by the outsider Mr. Rondo, about Robbie leaving George. Tempe informs George, "You have to tell the Delta something when your wife flies off and you start losing your Fairchild temper. … You should have thought of it when you married her" (203). Both Tempe and Ellen fear that the knowledge of Robbie's leaving George will affect the Fairchild's social identity, and both start damage control (Tempe with trying to figure out a "story" to give the Delta, and Ellen by portraying them as happily married). Even when her husband and daughter question her praise of their marriage, Ellen stands firm in her description that George and Robbie "get along beautifully" (146). She attempts to portray her family as flawless. She adds, "It's in their faces – I don't know if you pay much attention to that kind of thing, Mr. Rondo" (146) as if to say if he hadn't noticed how well they get along, it is because he is not observant. When she seemingly fails to present George and Robbie as perfectly married, her tone changes. Ellen turns to a veiled hospitality to scold Mr. Rondo for stopping by at lunch time without any notice or invitation. The narrator says, "They did not expect Mr.

Rondo, they hardly knew him, but plainly, Ellen saw, he considered his dropping in a nice thing" (145). The "argumentative look" that Battle gives him and Ellen's firm smile and polite scolding that he should have come for dinner clearly show Mr. Rondo that it was not a nice thing that he had dropped by unannounced and uninvited. In so doing, Ellen and Battle school Mr. Rondo in the ways of Fairchilds while putting him in his place.

However, they do not stop with argumentative looks or polite scolding; the Fairchilds spend Mr. Rondo's entire visit reminding him of their superiority. Battle, having accepted Mr. Rondo's presence, announces, "Well, entertain Mr. Rondo. Tell him about George on the trestle – I bet he'd like that" (146). Battle wants to "entertain" Mr. Rondo with a valiant story about George – the hero of the family. Battle sees this story as a perfect introduction for Mr. Rondo to the Fairchild family – a family he does not know well. India's version of the story differs from the story Orrin told Laura; since India is informing a non-family member of the incident, it requires more detail and explanation than did Orrin's simpler version as told to Laura. India informs Mr. Rondo of all those who were fishing. She says, "It was everybody but Papa and Mama … It was me, Dabney, Shelley, Orrin, and Roy, Little Battle and Ranny and Bluet, Uncle George and Aunt Robbie … And Maureen. And Bitsy and Howard and Big Baby and Pinchy … and Sue Ellen's boys and everybody in creation" (147). India rattles off this list of Fairchilds and their workers as if she assumes Mr. Rondo knows them; it is almost as if she is letting him know that these are people he should either know or get to know. In her listing, India separates Maureen from the rest of the family with an interjection to ask when Aunt Robbie would be joining the family for the wedding. She also separates the servants from the family members. She makes a clear break between family and the servants (as indicated by Welty in a sentence break) to clarify to Mr. Rondo the difference. It is interesting to note that India does not include Troy in

her list of those who went fishing the day of the trestle incident. Dabney must interject that Troy was there as well.

India, in her telling, paints George as the hero early in the story (75-9). As soon as she mentions the Yellow Dog, she mentions George stepping up and taking control. The words India puts in George's mouth make him sound rather different from the George that Welty portrays throughout the rest of the novel. According to India, George tells the family, "All right, sweet-hearts, jump" (148). India makes George out to be the kind, caring uncle they all love. She then explains his heroic actions in saving Maureen from the oncoming Yellow Dog train. George saves the helpless, mentally-stunted Maureen by wrestling her foot free just in time to fall off the trestle and stave off certain death. India, much like Ellen, wants to present an unflawed, Fairchild hero to those outside of the family. George, as the Fairchild hero, becomes the representation of everything the Fairchilds want the town to think of them all. India ends her story by casually adding, "and anyway the Dog stopped in plenty of time" as if it is an aside that is irrelevant in a story dedicated to George Fairchild's heroics. That the train stopped doesn't matter – what does matter is that even had it not stopped, George would not have left Maureen on the trestle to die alone.

When India is telling the story about the scene at the trestle, Battle encourages her to include Robbie's response to George's heroic act. Battle says, "Tell what Robbie says when it was all over, India … Listen, Mr. Rondo." India complies, "Robbie said, 'George Fairchild, you didn't do this for *me*!'" And, the family laughs at Robbie's absurdity. Mr. Rondo also learns of a second woman unworthy of the Fairchild name she married into:

> He was fully told, that Maureen had been dropped on her head as an infant, that her mother, Virgie Lee Fairchild, who had dropped her, ran away into Fairchilds

> and lived by herself, never came out, and that she wore her black hair hanging and matted to the waist, had not combed it since the day she let the child fall. … Their two lives had stopped on that day, and so Maureen had been brought up at Shellmound. (149)

While at first it appears that this story would harm the Fairchilds' social standing, the reality is that it provides Mr. Rondo with vital information that will serve to strengthen the family image. Mr. Rondo learns that Maureen's behavior is neither her fault nor the fault of any Fairchild. Maureen's speech and slow-mindedness is a result of poor parenting on the part of a woman (clearly crazy) who married into the family and has since been exiled. He also learns of the Fairchilds' charity and love for one another. Due to this horrible incident and Virgie Lee's abandonment of Maureen, the Fairchilds took in the child and raised her at Shellmound with Battle and Ellen's own children. Mr. Rondo also learns that outsiders – even those who marry into the Fairchild family – are subject to ridicule and are immortalized negatively in family stories if their behavior is not deemed acceptable by the Fairchilds. While Ellen, who married into the family, wants all the Fairchilds – unworthy wives and all – to be portrayed as perfect, the other Fairchilds want to share the stories of these unworthy wives to expose them as inferior. These stories show Mr. Rondo the Fairchild prominence within the town (Mr. Doolittle does stop the train for George and Maureen) and how even when family members marry beneath themselves, the family as a whole remains superior. Laughing at Robbie's reaction after the incident on the trestle minimalizes her. For the Fairchilds, it is comical that Robbie would even think George would do something heroic for her; he did it for Maureen – or Denis. When the family tells Mr. Rondo about Maureen and Virgie Lee, they clearly explain that Maureen's mental problems are caused by Virgie Lee who dropped the child on her head. Despite the

calamity Virgie Lee caused Maureen, the child is still Denis Fairchild's, and it is the Fairchild duty to raise her for him. These stories seem relatively unrelated, but to the outsider, Mr. Rondo, they both show the family's prominence, their separation from the embarrassing in-laws, and their good deeds.

Mr. Rondo is not the only visitor who is reminded of the Fairchilds' superior position while at Shellmound. Dr. Murdoch, who the day before had frustrated Shelley and Laura at the cemetery, is put in his place by Ellen when he comes to the wedding. When Dr. Murdoch asks if no one from Ellen's family in Virginia has come to the wedding (303), either Battle or Orrin (Ellen is unsure which) prods Ellen to tell the wedding guests the humiliating story of Dr. Murdoch's behavior when Ellen's mother came to visit years previous. Ellen's story includes her mother feeding Dr. Murdoch so much food that he had to lie down to recover, his knocking her mother out with his gas machine, and after acting superior to Ellen's mother, knocking himself out with the gas machine. With both her mother and the doctor drugged, Ellen must deliver Shelley with only Partheny's help. After Ellen finishes telling the story,

> They laughed till the tears stood in their eyes at the foolishness, the long-vanquished pain, the absurd prostrations, the birth that wouldn't wait, and the flouting of all in the end. All so handsomely ridiculed by the delightful now! They especially loved the way it made a fool of Dr. Murdoch, who was right there, and Ellen, her eyes bright from the story, felt a pleasure in that shameless enough to make her catch her breath. (305)

While at the cemetery earlier Dr. Murdoch feels free enough to say what he thought about the Fairchild family – including that some family members need to go on ahead and die (225) – now that he is a guest at Shellmound, he is unable to speak as freely as he had outside of the home.

With the single phrase taken as a slight – "Nobody from Virginia came, eh, Ellen?" (303) – Ellen puts him in his place and makes him look like a fool. In telling the story, Ellen reasserts Dr. Murdoch's inferiority to the family for which the town is named. Dr. Murdoch's only response is to "look straight back at her as always, as if he counted her bones" (305) before heading off to drink champagne with Uncle Pinck. He offers no defense or justification – there is none. He simply accepts his inferior position, smiles, and walks away.

Shellmound not only serves as a place where the Fairchilds can display their wealth and social standing; it also serves as a place of business. McDowell points out that "a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the 'merely' domestic or private sphere" (72-3). The social relations within the domestic space of Shellmound definitely cross over from private to public when considering the home as a place of business where the Fairchilds employ many workers. There are many black workers who work in the fields and in Shellmound as well as the other Fairchild homes; even Dabney's fiancé Troy is an employee of the Fairchilds.

There are no black characters that are anything other than employees present in any of the Fairchild homes. African-Americans who were not workers in the Mississippi Delta during the twenties would have been as rare as the presence of non-employee African-Americans in the Fairchild homes. McDowell points out, "In southern states, black domestic service is a relict of the patterns established in slavery" (84), and while the Fairchild servants are of course free, they are dependent upon the Fairchilds for work. The Fairchilds employed both field workers and house workers, and though the field workers are rarely seen inside the Fairchilds homes, they are a part of the business run out of these homes. The numerous black workers employed by the

Fairchilds seemingly work at all Fairchild properties and are employed by the collective Fairchild family and not by the individuals who live at the various houses/homes. The narrator informs the reader that George "gave" his sisters Little Joe to manage The Grove when he moved to Memphis (128). The Fairchild servants are passed from one sibling to another and given away like property – much like the homes themselves. Another example of this is when Battle sends his workers over to prepare Marmion for Dabney and Troy after the wedding. The workers are collectively used just as are all things that the Fairchilds collectively own and use. Though Troy, as overseer, supervises the day-to-day activities of the field workers, Battle's position as their boss is clearly shown when the narrator explains that Battle "rode out to see work done or 'trouble' helped; sometimes 'trouble' came at night. When Negroes clear to Greenwood cut each other up, it was well known that it took Uncle Battle to protect them from the sheriff or prevail on a bad one to come out and surrender" (100). Ultimately Battle is able to wield his power over the servants to resolve "trouble," something that Troy Flavin has already learned, though he is from the remote hill country around Tishimingo where there were few if any African-American servants.

When Laura first arrives at Shellmound, she remembers "the Negroes, Bitsy, Roxie, Little Uncle, and Vi'let" (8); these servants are all workers at Shellmound. Michael Kreyling points out that "Laura's welcome is underscored by the rhythm of work" (*Understanding Eudora Welty* 105). Welty writes, "The throb of the compress never stopped. Laura could feel it now in the handle of her cup, the noiseless vibration that trembled in the best china, was within it" (*Understanding Eudora Welty* 105). Though the compress is not close to the Fairchild home, Laura feels its presence in the vibrations as she drinks from the cup of the Fairchilds' fine china – which the Fairchilds have afforded with the money made from the staple provided by the labor

of the servants working the compress and fields. However, the narrator also mentions Little Matthew and Lethe as workers at The Grove, and Robbie muses about how clean she keeps the flat in Memphis with the help of only one black worker (though, technically, she has two; one does only the washing) (228).[26]

Though the field workers for the most part do not appear in the novel, they are often referred to by the family. Dabney is getting married in September in the height of cotton-picking season, and as Dabney and India travel between Shellmound and The Grove, they see many of the field workers. Both Ellen and Battle reference the field workers that could be spared during cotton-picking time as being sent to either Shellmound (to polish silver) or Marmion (to prepare the house for Dabney and Troy), and Troy is late to the rehearsal because he has to deal with problems between field workers. All of the field workers mentioned are Fairchild employees, working for the family business that is operated out of Shellmound. Though there are plenty of black workers in the fields, the workers in and around Shellmound spend the majority of the novel in wedding preparations. Roxie spends a great deal of her time in the kitchen cooking or helping the Fairchild women cook. She also cleans up after meals and serves cake. Howard builds the alter and tries to fix it when it rocks. Bitsy and his son wash the windows (or at least pretend to wash the windows) (186), and various black workers polish silver; clean the chandeliers; and bring in tables, packages from Memphis, and the cake. Michael Kreyling perfectly describes the constant presence of black workers when he writes that "the work sounds of the Negroes supply a background hum for the novel" (*Understanding Eudora Welty* 106).

When Ellen prepares to walk down to Brunswick-town to sit with Partheny, she makes a mental list of other business she needs to take care of while she's in Brunswick-town. She wants to stop in and give broth to Sue Ellen, Little Uncle's wife, who is pregnant and "not doing well"

(154), and she plans to talk to Oneida about dressing chickens. Ellen's visit to Brunswick-town is to check on and care for the ailing Fairchild servants and to give orders to Oneida. Marrs describes the relationship between the Fairchilds and the black servants:

> The plantation-owning Fairchilds deal with their servants in a congenial fashion, white and black children play together, and Ellen Fairchild sees to the health and well-being of the black servants. But these surface relationships mask a very deep separation. When the black matriarch Partheny is subject to spells of mindlessness, for instance, the Fairchilds are sympathetic, but they never see the tragic import of the spells. (95-6)

Ellen checks in on the ailing Partheny to help nurse her back to health so she can be productive in fulfilling the Fairchilds' needs. Once healthy, Partheny will be able to return to the house and aid in wedding preparations. Ellen also visits Partheny so that the sick woman does not keep Sylvanus from working the fields – where Troy expects him and where, ultimately, Battle needs him. While there, Ellen might as well check in on Sue Ellen and bring her the left over broth that Aunt Shannon refuses to eat. Though Ellen uses the words "speak in person to Oneida," what she really intends to do is tell Oneida what she expects her to do. Her insistence upon speaking with Oneida in person could be either distrust in the other workers to successfully relay the message or a means to make sure Oneida fully understands Ellen's expectations. Either way, Ellen clearly finds it important to speak to Oneida. Both of these reasons for visiting the black workers show that it is a part of Ellen's job as matron of the family business that employs these women and that is run out of the Fairchild home.

Throughout the novel, the narrator or family members continue to remind the reader that Troy is also a Fairchild employee. As Dabney and India are riding to The Grove, they see Troy

on Isabelle. Dabney remembers how she had heard the stories that everyone told of Troy and the ways in which they mocked him. She reflects, “Troy Flavin was the overseer. The Fairchilds would die, everybody said, if this [the marriage] happened” (119). Because he is a family employee, he is beneath Dabney and the rest of the Fairchilds. Though no one in the family tells Dabney of their concerns or objections regarding her marriage, several of the members question this marriage of Dabney to someone so undeserving of her. When Troy comes to the house for supper, Dabney runs to him and kisses him. The narrator says, “India saw Troy – he was a black wedge in the lighted window” (141). Troy marrying into the Fairchild family brings a blemish to the family’s seemingly glowing facade.

When Aunt Tempe arrives at Shellmound, Ellen and Troy are in the kitchen polishing silver. Ellen does not want to introduce Tempe to Troy as he’s working in the kitchen; she wants to present him to her properly – as Dabney’s fiancé and not as the overseer and worker that he is (126). After polishing the silver, Troy notices that Aunt Mac is ironing the payroll, and as he asks about it, his hand reaches toward his money pocket (184), and then he walks “a little gingerly out of the kitchen, as if he might be offered his salary before he got out, fresh and warm from the iron” (185). Just when Ellen begins to learn more about Troy and relate to him, his position as employee resurfaces as he hopes (to no avail) to get paid while still in the kitchen. Later, as Troy comes hastily towards the house to show the Fairchilds the quilts his mother sent for a wedding present, Aunt Primrose says, “I wouldn’t have known him! … But I always think of him as part horse – you know, the way he’s grown to that black Isabelle in the fields” (200). Aunt Primrose still sees Troy as a field overseer and not as the man about to marry Dabney and become a part of the Fairchild family.

Shelley too is reminded of Troy's worker status. When she goes to get him for the rehearsal dinner, she is appalled that he would keep the entire Fairchilds family and their guests waiting on him, so she barely knocks before walking in. As a Fairchild, she sees it as her right to enter uninvited. The office is part of the Fairchild land, and Troy is a Fairchild employee – one who has left the whole family waiting. However, what Shelley walks into is the point of an ice pick and a scary situation. She runs to Troy and he pushes her behind him. Once the danger passes, Shelley finds the courage and exhilaration that went missing on the trestle. Shelley, feeling trapped in the overseer's office, finally sees a legitimate reason why Dabney should not marry Troy: "Nobody could marry a man with blood on his door" (285). While Shelley hints at a seemingly superstitious reasoning for Dabney to not marry Troy, what lies behind it is that Troy, as overseer of the Fairchilds plantation, works in a job that puts him in danger such as she just experienced. As Shelley leaves the office, Troy is preparing to dig buckshot out of Big Baby's buttocks with an ice pick. Welty writes, "Running back along the bayou, faster than she had come, Shelley could only think in her anger of the convincing performance Troy had given as an overseer born and bred" (285). Shelley sees that Troy's position is not a temporary one that should disappear once he marries a Fairchild – it is in his nature and what he is best suited for, and this is what makes his marrying Dabney unacceptable to her. The next morning Shelley voices her protests, saying first, "I wish old Troy Flavin would just quit wanting to marry Dabney" (290). This is quickly shot down by Tempe who sees the social embarrassment that would come from Troy refusing to marry Dabney on the day of the wedding. Shelley later tries again with Ellen. She says, 'Mama, I think it's so tacky the way Troy comes in from the side door. … It's like somebody just walks in the house from the fields and marries Dabney" (294). Shelley again points out that the problem with Dabney marrying Troy Flavin does not lie in his

red hair, his hairy ears or knuckles, his non-Deltan roots, or his slow speech; the largest problem is in Troy's position as Fairchild overseer. However, as was bound to happen, during the wedding, "Troy came in from the side door, indeed like somebody walking in from the fields to marry Dabney" (294), the emphasis made plain by Welty's repetition.

Employing workers is not the only evidence the reader sees of Shellmound as a place of business. Earlier in the novel, returning from picking Laura up at the train station, the Fairchild children spit at the overseer's house. Laura, confused, asks about Mr. Bascom – the overseer when Laura last visited. The narrator later informs the reader that Ellen had dreamed about the mistakes in the accounts and in payroll that revealed Mr. Bascom's theft. The narrator points out that Battle is not a "born business man" (153), yet he is the head of the family business. It is unclear whether Ellen, who can apparently balance accounts books in her sleep, is not allowed to balance the books on a regular basis because she is a woman or because she is not a Fairchild,[27] but as an obedient wife, she concedes the job to the inept Battle.

While the Fairchild homes are the most prevalent in the novel, the reader gains a glimpse into the social identity of the African American homes when Shelley, India, and Laura visit Brunswick-town. When they arrived, it was "dead quiet," and the only ones home were the "old women." The girls make their trip to Brunswick-town in the middle of the morning on a Friday in September – the middle of cotton-picking season. The men and younger women are in the fields or at the house helping the Fairchilds prepare for Dabney's wedding. The girls do not see Brunswick-town during a time when it is active; they go when it is quietest and when their presence will be less of an intrusion on the lives of the community. The houses in Brunswick-town are all alike, and they are shaded by chinaberry trees. The women of the community kept the area "shady, secret, lazy, and cool" (216). This cool shade provided by the flora they have

planted would have made the Mississippi heat more bearable during the summer months. The houses are "white-washed," but the doors are painted green. The OED gives several definitions for whitewash, the most being: "a liquid composition of lime and water, or of whiting, size and water, for whitening walls, ceilings, etc." ("white washing"). Whitewashing was cheaper than paint but had a similar use – though whitewash would wash away more quickly than paint and had to be reapplied more often. The white color reflected the sun, much like white paint, and that kept the home cool. It also was a way of making the simple homes of African Americans and lower class whites resemble the homes of the white elite. However, the OED mentions another definition of "whitewash" that may also apply: "To give a fair appearance to; to free, or attempt to free, from blame or taint; to cover up, conceal, or gloss over the faults or blemishes of" (OED). Whitewashing would cover up the blemishes of a cheaply constructed house. With the amount of sharecropping and sharerenting present in the Delta, it is probable that the homes in Brunswick-town were owned by the Fairchilds and whitewashed according to Battle's instructions. Cobb writes, "As the Delta's black population swelled, the percentage of black farmers who owned their own land shrank from 7.3 in 1900 to 2.9 by 1925" (112). It is conceivable that the vast majority of African-Americans living in Brunswick-town did not own the houses in which they lived. If the houses were owned by the rich planter class (most prominently, the Fairchilds themselves), then whitewashing these houses may subliminally serve as an attempt to cover up or conceal the African-American population and the regional wrongs that had been done to it.

Whether these houses were owned by the Fairchilds, other white planters, or the African-American characters, what made them home to the characters went beyond property ownership. The narrator points out, "Here, where no grass was let grow on the flat earth that was bare like

their feet, the old women had it shady, secret, lazy, and cool" (216). John Burrison writes about the tradition of grassless, dirt yards that were swept often, explaining, "This normally was done with a brush broom homemade of twigs bound with twine. The practice was concentrated among, but not exclusive to, the African American population" (54). He outlines the reasons why this was done: "Practical explanations include preventing dry-weather brush fires from igniting a farm's wooden buildings, and discouraging unwanted 'critters' – especially snakes – from getting near the house … Sweeping the yard thus was a civilizing act that transformed uncontrollable nature into habitable space" (54). Burrison uses an excerpt from Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" to explain how the swept yard serves as an extension of the house (55). Walker writes:

> A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, any one can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house. (47)

In houses that are characteristically small, the swept yard serves as an extra room for the inhabitants. The breezes that are unable to get into the house are clearly felt in the swept yard. While each family may have its own private home inside the house, the community makes a home of the shared swept yards that are hidden in the cool shade of the trees. Duncan points out the importance of the home in the community's identity when he writes, "The private house under collectivism becomes a functional dwelling, a place of the family, that, because it is like the houses of others in the group, has the effect of reinforcing one's identity within the group" (135). The continuity of similar houses, chinaberry trees hovering over all the houses providing

one shade, and the "invisible vine of talk" shows solidarity among the group. This solidarity provides the group with its own identity – separate from the other communities in Fairchilds and from whites specifically. This sense of community present in Brunswick-town is missing for the Fairchilds at Shellmound. McDowell writes that for African Americans, "the home has long been one of the only places of escape from the oppressive relations of first slavery and later racist society" (89). The African American characters in *Delta Wedding* are able to retreat to their home, Brunswick-town, and find escape from the inferior worker status they hold at the Fairchild homes. These characters can come home to a place where they have community presence and status. All the inhabitants of Brunswick-town maintain a community identity that is embodied in their homes – both the physical structures of the individual homes as well as the communal dirt yards and shaded excluded areas they've created to help them maintain an identity that is distinctively contrary from the condescending, stereotypical identity that the white upper class has bestowed upon them.

The Optimist's Daughter offers no map of Mount Salus as readers have for *Delta Wedding*. However, Welty does give the reader textual clues that hint at the positioning of the McKelva home and the prominence of the McKelva family. "The house… is the largest and costliest private object whereby individuals can assert their identity. It is used to display to others who one is, what one's class, life-style, and tastes are, in other words to help others situate the potentially free-floating individual within the social structure" (Duncan 135). The McKelva home on Main Street in Mount Salus positions the McKelvas in the Mount Salus community and social hierarchy. The home is located three and a half blocks down from the court house on Main Street.[28] The McKelva home is not only on the prominent Main Street, but it is close to the heart of the town and in walking distance to the courthouse, the church, and the homes of all of the

members of the McKelva's social circle. The narrator points out, "the bridesmaids' parents still lived within a few blocks of the McKelva house" (958). The McKelvas and their friends are a tight-knit group of neighbors who are familiar enough with the McKelva home to be able to let themselves in and to know where things belong when they prepare for Laurel and Fay's arrival.

The McKelvas were at the heart of the Mount Salus's social group. The women still grow Becky's flowers and use her recipes. Clint McKelva demonstrates when the community members should put away their winter clothes and pull out their spring ones on Straw Hat Day (11). McKelva's title of judge and his previous title of mayor show his position in the town. The current mayor calls him a "noble Roman" upon whose life he has modeled his own (888). Having both Becky's and Clint's funerals at the home instead of at the funeral parlor reveals the high standing of the McKelva family. Mrs. Bolt, the Presbyterian minister's wife, tells Laurel, "You know, people like *this* don't die every day in the week" (921) and Tennyson Bullock (who is a counterpoint to Tempe in her social authority) later expresses her disappointment in Dr. Bolt's inability to do Clint's life justice with his funeral sermon (948). The narrator points out that "Mount Salus Presbyterian Church had been built by the McKelvas, who had given it the steepest steps in town to make it as high as the Courthouse it was facing" (936). Having paid for the church, the McKelvas wanted the seat of the local religious community to match in height the seat of the local government. The fact that the McKelvas could afford to build the church asserts the high social standing of the family in the community. Though the narrator notes that the McKelvas were not well-off until later in Judge McKelva's life, they were financially stable enough to build the church and help Nate Courtland with medical school during the Depression. However, their financial standing aside, the McKelvas were active in various parts of Mount Salus social life.

Clint and Becky's social standing ensured Laurel's social prominence as well. Though Laurel had lived in Chicago for the twenty years since college, her place in Mount Salus society had not changed. The mayor is quick to defend Laurel to the Chisoms by saying,

> This girl here's surrounded by her oldest friends! And listen further: the bank's closed, most of the Square's agreed to close for the hour of services, county offices closed. Courthouse has lowered its flag out front, school's letting out early. That ought to satisfy anybody that comes asking who she's got. (923-4)

Though all this is done to honor Judge McKelva, the mayor uses these demonstrations of respect to show Laurel's position in the town. Laurel has maintained close friendships with her Mount Salus friends (the children of her parents' friends) to the point that even decades after Laurel is married and left widowed, they still call themselves "the bridesmaids" as if their friendship has been frozen in time and forever remains at the state that it was when Laurel married. The bridesmaids and Laurel are together the night before Laurel leaves town, and they discuss Laurel's wedding, the parties Judge McKelva threw for Laurel, and how much he enjoyed the celebrations and spared no expense. Tish points out, "Your daddy knew how to enjoy a grand occasion as well as we did – as long as it stayed elegant" (959). One bridesmaid exclaims, "Wartime or no wartime, we had pink champagne that Judge Mac sent all the way to New Orleans for! … And a five piece Negro band" (958). Another bridesmaid chimes in, "Miss Becky thought it was utter extravagance. Child-foolishness. But Judge Mac insisted on it all, a big wedding right on down the line" (958). Despite his wife's disapproval, Judge McKelva spent extravagantly on his only daughter's wedding, and the bridesmaids still remember it all these years later. Much like the Fairchilds, the McKelvas display their wealth and prominence in the

parties and wedding ceremony they provided for Laurel in their home or in their home church – itself an indicator of the family's prominence.

However, the social standing of the McKelva family was not dependent upon extravagant spending. Clint, Becky, and Laurel were integral parts of Mount Salus society. At Clint's home the morning of the funeral, the narrator points out, "the County Bar, the elders of the church, the Hunting and Fishing Club cronies; thought they seemed to adhere to their own kind, they slowly moved in place, as if they made up the rim of a wheel that slowly turned itself around the hub of the coffin and would bring them around again" (920). In death, just as in life, Clint McKelva remained the center around which the various Mount Salus social groups moved.

As Laurel greets visitors who have come to the McKelva home to pay their respects to Judge McKelva, the various social positions of different members of the Mount Salus community emerge. Tennyson Bullock welcomes Laurel to the home as if she is the lady of the house. As Becky's best friend, she assumes Becky's role in that sense. Adele Courtland knows where everything in the home belongs. She is able to clean up after all the guests leave and doesn't need to ask where any of the platters or dishes are stored. When Laurel hears a noise in the kitchen after everyone has gone home on the night she returns to Mount Salus, she knows it is Adele Courtland (915). All of Becky's bridge club (Tennyson Bullock, Adele Courtland, Mrs. Bolt, and Mrs. Pease) are all still very comfortable in the McKelva back yard; it is as if Becky had never been gone. The narrator goes so far as to say, "These four elderly ladies were all at home in the McKelva backyard" (946). With Judge McKelva out of the house and buried in the Mount Salus cemetery, the women feel free to say what they think and how they feel about the funeral, Laurel's life, and Fay.

Though the children of Clint and Becky and their friends are grown and there is no need to use the home to teach their children about socially accepted gender roles, the actions in the McKelva home the night before and the day of Judge McKelva's funeral shows the reader the socially accepted gender roles of Mount Salus, Mississippi. The night Laurel returned from New Orleans, the women of Mount Salus, Becky's friends, waited on Laurel and Fay. However, with the exception of Tennyson Bullock, they left their husbands at home. The narrator explains, 'It might have been out of some sense of delicacy that the bridesmaids and the older ladies, those who were not already widows, had all made their husbands stay home tonight" (913). The women of Mount Salus came husbandless to the home to greet Laurel and Fay, who are now both widowed, as if the women would be sensitive to the fact that men are around. Also, preparing the home for the family, bringing flowers, and preparing food are, in this society, all women's tasks. As Bolsterli points out,

> It is obvious that the events surrounding Laurel's return to Mount Salus with her father's body constitute a ritual calling for women only. The bridesmaids and the remnants of Laurel's mother's garden club have declined to bring their men. Major Bullock is the only man there, out of place and awkward… The preparation for the funeral … is women's work, and they approach it … with the skills that come from training. (152-3)

Major Bullock, the one man who refused to stay home, came to the McKelva home the night Laurel and Fay arrived back in town – the other men waited until the day of the funeral. Bullock's wife allows him to take part in the tasks usually assumed by the women in the community and come to the house to greet Laurel and Fay only because he is Clint's closest friend. With tears on his cheek and bourbon on his breath, Bullock helped the women and tried

to comfort both Laurel and Fay. The day of the funeral, Laurel thinks, "Major Bullock lived through his friends. He lived their lives with them – up to a point" (961). After the funeral, when all of the McKelvas' friends gathered at the home, Missouri tells Laurel, "Now! … The house looking like it used to look! Like it used to look!" (940). The McKelva home abuzz with all of Clint's, Becky's, and Laurel's friends reminds Missouri of years past when both Clint and Becky were still alive. Fay, by contrast, had not kept the house up to the standard as did Becky; she did not know how to cook – all cookware and kitchen things were shoved back in cabinets, and she did not make the bed. Tennyson Bullock and Adele Courtland came in and cleaned the house, the female members of Mount Salus community brought food, and Missouri is polishing the coffee urn. Ann Romines points out how domestic rituals preserve the home; she writes, "Thus a domestic ritual can be a large, important household occasion, such as a family reunion or a home wedding, or it can be an ordinary household task such as serving a meal or sewing a seam. All such rituals preserve the shelter" (12). The house is preserved to its pre-Fay condition by the domestic rituals that the women of the Mount Salus community, Laurel, and Missouri perform the night before and the day of the funeral. The house, now filled with old friends and cleaned, feels and looks like the home Clint and Becky built and the one in which Missouri and Laurel grew up and with which they both were accustomed. The men of Mount Salus merely show up for the wake and tell stories of Clint as a hero, townsman, and friend.

The McKelvas and their closest friends are not the only social circles present at the McKelva home after the death of Clint. Tom Farris, the town blind man, speaks to no one, but he enters the home and goes to his familiar place, the piano stool. His experience in the home had been as workman – there to tune the piano (930). Verna Longmeier also previously entered the home as a worker. "Laurel knew her for the sewing woman. She would come to people's houses

and spend the whole day upstairs at the sewing machine, listening and talking and repeating and getting everything crooked" (925). However, unlike Tom Farris, Verna Longmeier "lumbered into the house" wearing worn-out shoes, but acting as if she were a member of the McKelva social class. Without Clint or Becky there to contradict her, she proclaims, "And they'd throw open those doors between these double parlors and the music would strike up! And then… then Clinton and I, we'd lead out the dance" (925). Laurel remembers that even though Verna Longmeier was out of her mind, no one in Mount Salus contradicted her. Tom Farris comes to the home to see Judge McKelva the morning of the funeral, but he accepts his own social position below Clint McKelva's and pays his respects to the family in a manner that does not challenge the social position of either. Verna Longmeier enters the McKelva house as if she belongs in the social class with the McKelvas and flaunts this false social standing. There is no need for those in the town to correct her because they know where she falls in Mount Salus society, and her actions do more to demean her position than to raise it. Mr. Cheek also comes to the home to do work. Mr. Cheek is based on Mr. Day, a real man, and was called Mr. All-Day in a previous version of the novel (*What There Is To Say* 224). William Maxwell wrote to Welty that Emmy loved "Mr. [All-day], going through the whole house like hope and leaving it worse than before," best about the story (*What There Is To Say* 224). While Emmy Maxwell loved the fictional character, Becky and Laurel McKelva were less favorable to the man. They despised how he entered their house as if he were familiar with the house and family. The narrator points out that Becky "had deplored his familiar ways and blundering hammer, had called him on his cheating" (982); Laurel hated the way he speaks flippantly about the master bedroom being his favorite room in the house – as if he had been acquainted with it. Despite Becky and Laurel's dislike for Mr. Cheek, he is granted access to the home.

Unlike the others who entered the McKelva home sporadically to fix things or do odd jobs, Missouri, though a maid, daily entered the McKelva home on a different basis. Her relationship with Clint, Becky, and Laurel was a close one. She cooked their meals and cleaned the house and did whatever the McKelvas needed Monday through Saturday. But Missouri's relationship with the McKelvas began when she was shot as a girl, and Clint tried to find the person who shot her. He took her in, cared for her, and gave her employment. Missouri is the only member of black Mount Salus who was in the McKelva home after Clint's death. Though members of different social classes were granted access to the home on the day of the funeral, black Mount Salus did not try to come to the house. Positions of status may be overlooked in a home of a prominent family in Mississippi in the 1970s, racial positions would not be. Black Mount Salus does not challenge these roles by coming to the home, instead they came dressed in black to the funeral at the Presbyterian church (937). Charles Reagan Wilson points out, "Whites and blacks at times attended funerals together, but they behaved in highly patterned ways reflecting racial segregation. Blacks at white funerals sat or stood in the back of the room" (103). Black Mount Salus did not come to the home because that would violate the racially segregated social patterns. Mount Salus Blacks were not socially linked to Judge McKelva in a manner which would justify their presence at the more intimate viewing at his home. Missouri was at the home; however, she was not there as a guest or family friend; she was there as a worker. She spent the day in her apron fixing Fay breakfast in bed, carrying trays of food and drink, and stirring the fire. The workers all have differing degrees of familiarity with the McKelva family and their home; they are also all Mount Salus community members. While advances in racial equality were occurring in Mississippi in the last 1960s and early 1970s, the McKelva home provides no evidence of this.

One group that is not a part of the Mount Salus community is Wanda Fay Chisom McKelva and her family. Despite living in Mount Salus for the year and a half that she was married to Clint McKelva, Fay was never accepted into the community. In the Foreword to the Franklin Library edition of *The Optimist's Daughter*, Welty writes, "Fay is an outsider as Becky's successor, and socially she never will fit in, in Mount Salus" (309).[29] Many among Mount Salus' socially elite have discussed how inept Fay is as a society woman. Becky's friends were appalled that Fay could not separate an egg or name things in the kitchen. On Sundays when Missouri would not come to the home to cook, Fay and Clint went to the Iona Hotel for dinner. Mrs. Pease says, "Oh, it's been the most saddening exhibition within my memory" (948). Tennyson and Adele Courtland were shocked by how unkept the house looked when they entered to prepare for the arrival of Laurel and Fay. It is Judge McKelva who kept up Becky's garden – not Fay. Adele Courtland had offered to help Judge McKelva prune the bushes (885) because Fay did not. "Fay has been received with veiled horror by … [Laurel's] parents' contemporaries and friends. … To these women, housekeeping is the medium in which women enact their values; continuity, order, fidelity, and filial piety" (Romines 259). The more prominent women of Mount Salus all cooked, kept a presentable home, and gardened – tasks that keep a home running; Fay did none of this. When Tennyson Bullock offered to give Fay a party to welcome her to Mount Salus and to their social group, Fay responds, "Oh, please don't bother with a big wholesale reception. That kind of thing was for Becky" (960). It was also the kind of thing that was proper social behavior for the women of the Mount Salus community, more specifically the wives or widows of Clint McKelva's closest friends. Eisinger points out, "The intrusion upon the expected order and ritual creates a tension between traditional modes of behavior and the impulsive, self-satisfying, accidental behavior of those without standards" (24).

Fay's refusing the reception also served as a refusal to be introduced to the traditional way of life for women in Clint's social circle . When Fay returns from speaking with the local undertaker Mr. Pitts, she wants to know, "What are all these people doing in my house?" (913). Tennyson Bullock introduces the group to Fay as if she's never seen these people before, and Fay informs the room, "Well, I didn't know I was giving a reception" (913). Fay did not want a reception when she first moved to Mount Salus and she clearly does not want one after returning from New Orleans. Mrs. Bolt wonders, "What did she do with herself while he was *here*?" (946). Such comments imply that these women have not been regular guests in the McKelva home since Clint and Fay married. Though Becky's friends once felt at home in the McKelva garden and home, they are no longer welcome.

The women of Mount Salus are horrified by Fay's actions the day of the funeral. Fay remains upstairs while Laurel and Becky's friends welcome guests coming to pay their respects; she finally comes down just before time for the funeral. Laurel, the dutiful daughter, has stood where the dutiful wife should have been standing. Instead of performing her socially assumed and accepted role of wife and host during her husband's wake, Fay remained upstairs alone. When she does finally come downstairs, she "burst from the hall into the parlor" and "came running a path through all of them toward the coffin" (933). Though Laurel pleads with the crowd to stop Fay, no one does. In stark contrast to Laurel's declarations to "Stop her" and whispers of "no," the recently arrived Chisom family seems to find Fay's behavior normal. Mrs. Chisom provides play-by-play commentary as Fay enters the room and publicly displays her anguish and grief. She proclaims, "She's wasting no time, she's fixing to break aloose right now" (933), then "she's cracking" and "Like mother, like daughter. Though when I had to give up her dad, they couldn't hold me half so easy. I tore up the whole house" (935). Fay, encouraged by

her family, continues with her meltdown. After commenting on how Clint looks, begging him to get up, and accusing him of cheating her,

> Fay struck out with her hands, hitting at Major Bullock and Mr. Pitts and Sis, fighting her mother, too, for a moment. She showed her claws at Laurel, and broke from the preacher's last-minute arms and threw herself forward across the coffin onto the pillow, driving her lips without aim against the face under hers. She was dragged back into the library, screaming, by Miss Tennyson Bullock, out of sight behind the bank of greenery. Judge McKelva's smoking chair lay behind them, overturned. (935)

It is not until Tennyson Bullock slaps Fay that the room recovers the reverence the occasion deserved. Fay's behavior in the home the morning of the funeral could not have been less socially acceptable to Mount Salus society.

While Becky's friends sit in the garden with Laurel after the day of the funeral, they discuss their horror at the way Fay acted and how her family seemed to support her behavior. Charles Reagan Wilson explains, "For the Southern poor, death was an event to be dealt with in a memorable way" (103). Fay's acts of grief certainly make a memorable impression on those who witness them. Mrs. Pease comments, "Let them in and you can't keep 'em down, when somebody dies. When the whole bunch of Chisoms got to going in concert, I thought the only safe way to get through the business alive was not to say a word, just sit as still as a mouse" (948). Tennyson Bullock adds, "The pitiful thing was, Fay didn't know any better than the rest of 'em. She just supposed she did" (948). Adele Courtland tries to explain Fay's behavior to the women. She says,

> Strangely enough … I think that carrying-on was Fay's idea of giving a sad occasion its due. She was rising to it, splendidly. – By her lights! … She wanted nothing but the best for her husband's funeral, only the most expensive casket, the most choice cemetery plot – … – and, … the most broken hearted, most distraught behavior she could manage on the part of the widow. … I further believe Fay thought she was rising in the estimation of Mount Salus, there in front of all his life-long friends, … And on what she thought was the prime occasion for doing it. (950)

Fay's behavior at the home the morning of the funeral displays what she and her family consider socially acceptable behavior for the widow hosting a wake in her home. The reaction of Laurel and the other members of Mount Salus community reflects the disconnect between what Fay sees as appropriate and what this more refined community sees as acceptable. Fay has always realized that she does not fit into Mount Salus society. Though her family is different from the Mount Salus community -- "if they didn't want me, they'd tell me to my face" (943) – Fay bonds with them even after saying earlier that she had no family. Mount Salus would never have accepted Fay, but they are never willing to tell her so. They wait, of course, until she is gone or out of earshot before they talk about her. After the funeral and after the Chisoms had left for Texas, taking Fay with them, Tennyson Bullock tells Laurel, "Do you know, Laurel, who was coming to my mind the whole blessed way through? *Becky*! … And all I did was thank my stars she wasn't here. Child, I'm glad your mother didn't have to live through that. I'm glad it was you" (944). It is not Clint's death that Tennyson Bullock is glad Becky didn't live to see; it is the socially unacceptable display put on in Becky's home. However, later Adele Courtland will point out that Fay acted better than the Mount Salus community because they knew how to act appropriately

and still failed to do so (949-50). Fay never fit into Mount Salus society and never learned how to behave in ways Mount Salus found appropriate, and in some way that justifies her actions to Adele.

The various social groups that appear in the home the day of Judge McKelva's funeral reveal a social pecking order based on privilege and manners. The social identity revealed in the home after Clint McKelva's death actually clashes with the identity Laurel has for her family and their home. When she walks into the home for the first time after her father's death, she notices, "Here at his own home, inside his own front door, there was nobody who seemed to be taken by surprise at what had happened to Judge McKelva" (912). As she walked into what she remembers as a sanctuary for Clint, Becky, and Laurel, Laurel expected to see what she was feeling: shock and grief. Instead what she finds is "practiced-for smiles" on the faces of those she and her parents knew best. Laurel remembered "that Presbyterians were good at this" (912). The members of Judge McKelva's social class were mostly Presbyterians, but they were all Christians. John Crowe Ransom discusses how Southern religious society uses ritual to provide a code of manners in reacting to the death of someone:

> The religious society exists in order to serve the man in this crisis. Freed from his desolation by its virtue, he is not obliged to run and throw himself upon the body in an ecstasy of grief, nor to go apart and brood upon the riddle of mortality, which may be the way of madness. His action is through the form of grief, which is lovingly staged and attended by the religious community. His own grief expands, is lightened, no longer has to be explosive or obsessive. (35)

Judge McKelva's friends act exactly as the religious society of the South is supposed to act; they grieve in their own way, but it is not a grief of theatrics or grand emotional gestures. After she

walks into the home and embraces her parents' friends, Laurel then begins to play mediator between those friends, her parents' memory, and Fay in a struggle to preserve her image of the home built by Clint and Becky and shared with Laurel. The community has infiltrated her home of safety. Without her parents, she remains the sole defendant of the home the three of them shared. In attempts to protect the home of her parents, she plays the role of peacekeeper between Fay and her parents' friends who have come to greet them. When Fay walks in wondering, "What's Becky's Garden Club got to do with me?" (914) and informing everyone, "The funeral's not till tomorrow" (914), Laurel quickly attempts to smooth things over by telling Fay that her father would expect these people to be here to greet his daughter and widow. When Fay slams the door upstairs (however weakly), Laurel notes that she had never heard a door slammed in the house (915), and she moves to her father's best friend for a comforting embrace.

The next morning, before the funeral, "[a] low thunder traveled through the hall downstairs and shook in her hand as she tried to put the pins in her hair" (918). Laurel immediately goes downstairs to take back control of the home from Tennyson Bullock (919). Once she realizes her father's body has arrived, she heads straight to him and spends the rest of the morning standing at his head. Laurel wants the casket closed, as her mother's had been. Laurel speaks to both Mr. Pitts and Miss Tennyson when she says, "But father would never allow – when Mother died, he protected her from – . . . He was respecting her wishes, . . . Not to make her lie here in front of people's eyes –. . . I would like him away from their eyes" (920). Though Laurel could not protect her father from Fay's actions in the hospital, now that her father is back in his home, Laurel seeks to protect him in the same way he believed he had protected her mother. In his home, if nowhere else, Judge McKelva deserves to be protected from this exposure. Laurel, however, is unable to protect him because Mr. Pitts and Miss Tennyson grant

Fay's wish to have the casket open. When Verna Longmeier comes into the home, the narrator points out, "This caller was out of her mind, yet even she was not being kept back from Judge McKelva's open coffin" (925). During the visitation, it is almost as if Laurel's inability to keep the casket closed coupled with her father's presence back in the home, emboldens her to fight even harder to protect his memory. She stands at her father's head (926) as if the two of them plot together against everyone else. Every one who looks into her father's face must also look into Laurel's. Since she cannot enforce a closed casket, she stands guard at her father's head ready to protect him against anything.

As a means to protect her father's character, memory, and identity, Laurel wants her father remembered correctly. She allows a bit of ostentatious talk before finally speaking out against those ennobling her father. When Major Bullock begins immortalizing Judge McKelva, by saying, "Oh, I've modeled myself on this noble Roman" (926), Laurel keeps a watch on him but does not say anything. She listens quietly to Dr. Woodson's story of Clint's near-death experience adding only that "[f]ather was delicate" (927). She hears laughter and bits of stories from the library, realizing that all the members of the bar (except Major Bullock) had gone to her father's library to smoke cigars and tell stories (929). However, when Major Bullock begins loudly telling all the guests the story of "the day. . . Clint McKelva stood up and faced the White Caps," Laurel refuses to remain silent any longer (930). Her frustration seems to come both from the fact she thinks the story is untrue and her annoyance with her father's friends falsely exalting him. Laurel tells Tish, "I don't think that was Father . . .He hadn't any use for what he called theatrics . . . in the courtroom or anywhere else. He had no patience for show. . . . He's trying to make Father into something he wanted to be himself" (930-1). Laurel does not want the wake to turn into a show of Clint's friends telling exaggerated stories. In his home, Clint McKelva

deserves to be preserved as he was (or how Laurel believed he was), not as his friends describe him now, and Laurel feels as if it is she who must make sure the true Clint McKelva is preserved.

Later, the members of the bar begin to tell the story of when Judge McKelva brought home Missouri after she was shot witnessing a crime. Laurel is proud of her father for bringing Missouri home with him to protect her and by employing her for all these years, and she feels the story should be seen as honorable, not comical (932). Laurel is also horrified that the men are telling this story with Missouri in earshot. Laurel feels that her father would never allow Missouri to hear his friends telling this story and laughing, and Laurel becomes angered at the men for doing so now when her father cannot stop them. Laurel has reached her breaking point, and she pleads her case to Miss Adele who tries to help Laurel see the other side of the story. While the passage is rather long, it reveals a good deal about how Laurel feels and why she has to fight against their words in order to protect her shell-house.

> "What's happening isn't real," Laurel said, low.
>
> "The ending of a man's life on earth is very real indeed," Miss Adele said.
>
> "But what people are saying."
>
> "They're trying to say for a man that his life is over. Do you know a good way?"
>
> Here helpless in his own house among the people he'd known, and who'd known him, since the beginning, her father seemed to Laurel to have reached at this moment the danger point of his life.
>
> "Did you listen to their words?" she asked. . . . "They said he was a humorist. And a crusader. And an angel on the face of the earth," Laurel said.

> Miss Adele, looking into the fire, smiled. "It isn't easy for them, either. And they're being egged on a little bit, you know, Laurel, by the rivalry that's going on here in the room," she said. "After all, when the Chisoms walked in on us, they thought they had their side, too – "
>
> "Rivalry? With Father where he lies? . . . This is still his house. After all, they're still his guests. They're misrepresenting him – falsifying, that's what Mother would call it." Laurel might have been trying to testify now for her father's sake, as though he were in the process of being put on trial in here instead of being viewed in his casket. . . . "I'm his daughter. I want what people say now to be the truth." (932-3)

The fact that Judge McKelva is helpless does not bother Laurel as much as that he's "helpless in his own home" (932). This moment, the moment where he can no longer defend himself, is the "danger point of his life" (932). Laurel is horrified by the rivalry between the Chisoms and Mount Salus society, and she thinks in their home, with her father lying there in his coffin, is the last place this rivalry should occur. Laurel's pleas for the lies and rivalry to stop are the only defense she has of protecting her father from this danger, and she is quickly realizing the pleas are not working. Her final plea to Miss Adele is, "The least anybody can do for him is *remember* right" (933). Laurel insists that Mount Salus society remember her father correctly, but correctly means as Laurel remembers him. The way in which Laurel remembers her father must stay intact if the identity she shared with her parents and their home is to remain unharmed. Laurel's realization that "[t]he mystery in how little we know of other people is no greater than the mystery of how much" (931) does not change her insistence that the way she remembers her father is the truth, and everyone else's stories are lies. Laurel's statement, "This is still his house"

(933), is itself a lie. It is no longer his house, nor is it Laurel's; it is Fay's house now. Laurel's claim on the house for her father is a claim on the home he built with her mother and her. Christopher Crocker explains,

> From an individual standpoint, social time is serial, non-repetitive, yet from the position of society this must not be the case. To admit what has happened may not happen again, that the passing of an individual creates a vacuum which may never be filled up, is to admit the falseness of social categories and the vulnerability of social processes. (127)

For Laurel, the individual life of her father creates a personal vacuum, but this is not true for the Mount Salus society. Just as the current mayor replaced Clint when he moved on from being mayor of Mount Salus and another judge replaced him when he retired from the bench, the social categories fulfilled by Clint will be filled by someone else. Life in Mount Salus without Clint will continue just as life in Mount Salus continued without Becky and just as life went on after Clint married an unsuitable wife who refused to integrate into Mount Salus social life. The exaggerated tales of Clint McKelva's heroics serve as a fleeting gesture to make the deceased stand out as socially irreplaceable.

However little Laurel was able to keep Major Bullock and the members of the bar in check, she stood no hope of forcing Fay to maintain some sense of decorum worthy of her father. When Fay comes down to perform her public display of grief, Laurel is pushed aside to simply watch in horror as Fay throws herself into the casket and onto the body of Judge McKelva. Laurel merely looks into her father's face noting mentally that the face remains unchanged. Though the face remains unchanged, Laurel notes that something has changed. The narrator writes, "In the moment of silence that came after that, Laurel looked at her father for the last

time, when there was only herself to see him like this. Mr. Pitts had achieved one illusion, that danger to his lived life was still alive; now there was no longer that" (936).

Fay's actions, on top of the contrast between the Chisoms and Mount Salus society and the exaggerated stories and lies told by Judge's friends, have done all the damage that can be done to Judge McKelva's lived life. The damage done to his lived life is also damage to Laurel's notion of a home in which he, Laurel, and her mother lived. Before they carry away her father, she offers up one more defense for the home she shared with her parents. Instead of fighting back, the only thing she can do is speak into a quiet, but unlistening, room, "He loved my mother" (936). Laurel's short eulogy for her father shows that despite the damage done, she has come through the day with her memory of her parents and the home they shared still intact. This knowledge outweighs everything else to Laurel. She does not see her father as a social figure; he holds a much more intimate and irreplaceable position for her as her father. He is indeed irreplaceable; his role will not be filled by another. Her father still loved her mother, her mother still loved her father, and both loved her. This knowledge allows her to continue to see the McKelva house as a home, full of love and protection.

It is through analyzing Welty's presentation of the complex identity of home that the reader grasps a better understanding of the worlds in which the Fairchilds and the McKelvas live. George Core writes, "Scene comes to life against the massed details that emerge from and through the depiction of place. We get a sharp sense of the landscape abutting the house, and at the same time we learn something about the neighborhood and the town where it is…, so that the microcosm of the scene and the succession of scenes lead us to the macrocosm of the world beyond" (5). As *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* unfold, the reader sees the ways in which the identity which is shared with the home and the identity of the social fabric of the town

coincide or conflict, giving a larger picture of the characters and their places. Both the Fairchilds and McKelvas use their homes to showcase their prominence and wealth. The Fairchilds use their home to teach their children about socially acceptable behavior and about accepted ideas of the way society works. It can be assumed that Clint and Becky McKelva used their home to teach Laurel these same lessons. Though there is no evidence of this in the novel, there is evidence of how specific gender and class roles play out in the home of a prominent judge in Mount Salus, Mississippi. The Fairchilds clearly use Shellmound as a container for the Fairchild identity and they use it as a way to make that identity known to the community of Fairchilds. No matter how much the Fairchilds present a united wall of a family identity to both other members of the family and the society of Fairchilds, there are clear cracks in the wall that upon further examination of the home appear to be much larger than the Fairchilds acknowledge. For Laurel, the identity which she shares with her home in Mount Salus is challenged from the moment she arrives back at the house on Main Street. Her home has been breeched by both Fay and Mount Salus society, and despite her efforts to hold on to her identity of home, it is clearly beginning to crumble.

CHAPTER THREE: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

When Albert J. Devlin asked Welty about Ellen Fairchild being an outsider, Welty replied, "I think that was probably my first conception of that figure in my work, when you come to think of it. I realize I have used outsiders in fiction from time to time since; it gives you a point of view, a place to walk in. It gives you the outside view of what you're writing about. And I have to have that" (*More Conversations* 105). While there are many characters in Welty's earlier stories who could be designated outsiders, Ellen may have been the first character that Welty purposefully made an outsider. The idea of an outsider, or a partial outsider, pervades *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* (and every work in between). Attempting to separate the outsiders from the insiders is not always a clear cut exercise, but it gives a greater understanding to the ways in which characters are connected or not connected with each other and with the primary homes in each novel. Also, in both novels outsiders or partial outsiders threaten the primary homes and the identities shared with them.

The majority of the narrative perspectives given in *Delta Wedding* come from outsiders. Eisinger points out, "In making the point of view character so frequently an outsider … Welty shrewdly finds a way both to offer the family myth and to penetrate to a reality behind the myth" (16). Looking at the homes of the Fairchilds through the eyes of outsiders – even if only loosely labeled outsiders – shows a danger to the family identity. Welty, from Laura's perspective, writes, "It was funny how sometimes you wanted to be in the circle and then you wanted out of it in a rush. Sometimes the circle was for you, sometimes against you… Sometimes in the circle you longed for the lone outsider to come in – sometimes you couldn't wait to close her out. It was never a good circle unless you were in it… A circle was ugly without you" (161). While at times during *Delta Wedding* the circle of outsiders and insiders seems clearly drawn, that is not

always the case. The Fairchilds seem to believe this clear demarcation of outsiders and insiders exists, but throughout the novel many characters fluctuate between being inside the circle and out outside of it – sometimes by their own choice and sometimes by the choices of others.

The Fairchilds want others to see the clear line between outside and inside, and they create a wall between themselves and outsiders. Romines points out, "Within the novel, no one meditates on Fairchild rituals more intently than two female outsiders, Robbie and Laura" (227). It takes two outsiders to fully understand the family rituals at Shellmound and The Grove, and these outsiders are the ones who try to enlighten the Fairchild family to the world around them. Robbie tells them, "You're all a spoiled, stuck-up family that thinks nobody else is really in the world! But they are! You're just one plantation!" (253). However, Robbie is at least partly wrong. The truth is that the Fairchilds know there are others in the world. This fact became an undeniable part of the Fairchild history when (if not before) Ronald McBane killed James Fairchild in a duel. Marmion is abandoned because of its constant reminder to the family of the outside world. Marmion had been built by James Fairchild who died in the duel; it was abandoned and later left to Denis and Annie Laurie, both also now dead. The house still stands – abandoned, with an unclear owner – as a reminder of outside danger. The Fairchilds know there are others in the world, and they fear these others. It was the others who killed their family members in battle, married their family members and moved them away, or married their family members and tried to change the family dynamic. Gretlund points out that the Fairchilds "are convinced that they live safely in their shell in an unchanging world with seasons of changeless weather" (106). Shellmound is only one plantation, and the Fairchild family knows this, but it believes Shellmound is where the family can build a wall to try to protect itself while keeping others outside.

Upon entering the house for the first time, Laura sees her Fairchild family as isolated inside Shellmound, and she sees her family in a light different from how she had seen them before. While observing them, she gets a clear image:

> Laura found herself with a picture in her mind of a great bowerlike cage full of tropical birds her father had shown her in a zoo in a city – the sparkle of motion was like a rainbow, while it was the very thing that broke your heart, for the birds that flew were caged all the time and could not fly out, The Fairchilds' movements were quick and on the instant, and that made you wonder, are they free? (103)

Soon after arriving at Shellmound, Laura is already contemplating whether the Fairchilds are free or captive. The Fairchilds flit about carrying on various conversations while engaging in several activities. They seem happy, safe, and free but only while in the protective cage of Shellmound.

The image of the Fairchild family as birds in captivity occurs with more subtlety later in the novel. When Robbie finally arrives at Shellmound seeking out her husband, a bird enters the house with her. The family responds quickly:

> The Fairchilds jumped up buoyantly from their chairs. Orrin was the first out of the room, with the men next, and the children next, then Dabney and Shelley . . . The beating of wings could be heard. Frantically the girls ran somewhere, their hands pressing to their hair. The chase moved down the hall – seemingly up the back stairs. . . . "Get it out!" Get it out!" Shelley called, and Little Battle called after her, "Get it! Get it!" . . . There was a tramping upstairs and around corners, a sudden whistle of flight in the stair well, and tripping cries of her daughters in laughter or flight." (248-9, 251-2)

The movement of the children and male Fairchilds resembles the movement of the birds in the cage that Laura remembers from her trip to the zoo. While most of the family members are terrified of the bird and run as if they are running from it, not chasing it, none of the family members run outside. None flee the bird-possessed house. They remain in the house as if they really are caged-like the birds Laura remembers. When threats appear at Shellmound, whether it be the threat of a bird or Robbie's confrontation or even the overseer marrying into the family, the Fairchilds have nowhere to flee; instead, they run around inside the house chasing each other, yelling and laughing. For the Fairchilds, Shellmound is their safe haven; it is where they have some control over their environment and experiences. The Faichilds chasing each other around Shellmound is light-hearted and fun, and it is in stark contrast to the scene when George chases Robbie around the river bank, which the family saw as scandalous. What happens outside of the home is impossible to control, but within the safety of Shellmound, threats can be playfully swatted at and mockingly confronted.

The Fairchilds attempt to control their own environment at Shellmound by limiting access to outsiders. Some of these outsiders (Robbie Reid Fairchild, Ellen Fairchild, and Troy Flavin) are people who have married or will marry into the Fairchild family, and while at least the marriage partner in the family deems them worthy of the Fairchilds, the others do not. The porch serves as the final barrier to keep outsiders out of Shellmound and to keep family members inside. When Laura first tries to enter Shellmound, Maureen jumps in front of her and blocks Laura's entrance to the house. Maureen's actions seem simple and playful enough, but the way in which the home at Shellmound houses the Fairchild identity makes her actions more severe than a first reading may present. Maureen's blockade prevents Laura from entering the house and becoming a part of the Fairchild whole – as if there were not room enough in the Fairchild clan

for yet another nine-year-old girl. While Maureen is often seen as an outsider, she carries the Fairchild name, unlike Laura. The front porch serves as the entrance into Shellmound and the world of the Fairchilds, and Maureen stands guard. Laura, being a member of the family and thus entitled to access into the home, ignores Maureen's blockade and finds her way around Maureen, allowing herself access to the home and the family.

However, not all those who are kept out of Shellmound can find their way around in order to gain access. Another time the entrance to Shellmound is clearly blocked occurs during Dabney's wedding. While the "family servants" are allowed to stand in a ring around the parlor, all other blacks are forced to stand outside on the porch looking in through the windows. Only the blacks that are considered "family servants" are allowed to enter into Shellmound. The blacks standing on the porch during the wedding are not allowed inside to witness the marriage of Dabney and Troy; not even a special occasion can gain them access inside. The Fairchilds are protective of who they allow to enter Shellmound and who must stay outside, and the African American members of the community are denied.

Robbie Reid, however, has found a way inside – George. George brought Robbie into the family, and her family membership allows her access into the family homes – much to the chagrin of George's siblings and aunts. When Robbie arrives at Shellmound, she hears laughter coming from the dining room. Her immediate thought is simply: "The Fairchilds!" (242). When she walks into the dining room, she encounters a barricade of Fairchilds. Mary Lamar, the only non-family member present, excuses herself to play her music. Robbie, though greeted with kisses, hugs and offers of food, walks into "a scene" (245) where she stands alone against the entire Fairchild family. Robbie even admits later, "Sure I came here to fight the Fairchilds – but he wasn't even here when I came. Shelley warned him. All the Fairchilds run away" (252). The

Fairchilds run away from confrontation and danger, and where they run to are the Fairchild family homes. In this instance, Robbie's access into Shellmound has brought trouble inside the home, and George must flee to The Grove for protection from his wife's anger. While George's risk of his life on the trestle results in the fight between Robbie and himself, Robbie comes to Shellmound to fight not George but the Fairchilds. With a gesture as simple as a nine-year-old girl sticking out her tongue, Robbie gets her wish and the fight begins.

Robbie who had always wanted into the Fairchild circle is unhappy with what she discovers once she is allowed in. She says to those Fairchilds present in the dining room:

> It's funny . . . Once I tried to be like the Fairchilds. I thought I knew how. . . But you all – you don't ever turn into anybody. I think you are already the same as what you love. So you couldn't understand. You're just loving yourselves in each other – yourselves over and over again! . . . You still love *them*, and they still love you! No matter what you've all done to each other! You don't need to know how to love anybody else. (254-5)

Robbie realizes the downfall of the Fairchilds hiding behind the protective wall they have built. Refusing to allow others in has caused the Fairchilds to love only themselves and in a repetitive and fickle manner. Robbie now realizes what Shelley writes of in her diary. The Fairchilds (with the exception of George) love each other as a whole – as a family unit. It doesn't matter what indiscretions a family member makes because that can be dismissed by focusing on the family identity instead of the individual identity. Robbie points out how the Fairchilds as a unit are unchangeable, and they strive diligently to stay that way. They love themselves as they are, and the threat of outsiders pushes them to resist anyone new.

Robbie also knows that the family's insistence upon loving themselves as a whole has resulted in them not knowing George at all. "The Fairchilds were always seeing him by a gusty lamp – exaggerating, then blinding – by the lamp of their own indulgence. While she saw him lighted up by his own fire – no one else but himself was there" (280). Robbie, an outsider, does not see a hero meant to carry out the family duty when she looks at George; she sees a flawed man who is reckless, selfish, and angering. However, George's flaws are as much a part of what makes Robbie love him as are his strengths. Robbie knows that the Fairchilds see George as an emblem of heroism (a second rate one because Denis, dying young, will always remain first) and not as the real man he is. And she knows that knowing George as a real person and not as an ideal gives her the upper hand. It is this knowledge that allows her to face and fight the Fairchilds, to come to Dabney's wedding, and to address George in front of all of them as if none of them were there. Robbie's strength and determination come from the perspective she has gained being an outsider who has acquired access into the Fairchild lives.

It is rather poignant that when the members of the family are fighting against Robbie, only one family member is silent – Laura, another person who is only loosely tethered to the Fairchild unit. While Robbie has married into the family, Laura is a natural descendent of the Fairchilds. However, she does not carry the Fairchild last name (ironically, the Fairchilds name is also denied to Robbie Reid, who is never referred to by her married name by the family or to the reader), and her position within the family is uncertain. Laura's visit to Shellmound for Dabney's wedding is unlike any other visit she has previously made. Her mother's death has changed her place in the family and her understanding of the family dynamic. Battle and Shelley explain to Laura how she and Maureen fit into the family unit. Battle informs Laura, "She's just as much Fairchild as you are" (150). Maureen carries the Fairchild last name, but Laura does not.

Battle, in equating Maureen's Fairchild-ness to Laura's, points out that even though she carries the name McRaven – son of Raven, which emphasizes her paternal family – Laura is still a blood Fairchild. Battle's explanation seeks to bring Laura into the circle while making sure not to exclude Maureen. Battle wants Laura to secure her identity as a Fairchild so that she can carry it with her if she ever leaves to go back to Jackson.

When all the cousins begin to recline after supper, Laura stays at the table observing her lounging family members through a mirror as if trying better to understand these people and her connection to them. Her place as outsider is indicated by her indirect observation, but her inclusion is highlighted by her reflection intermingling with the reflections of her family members. Not much later, Ellen returns to the dining room and also observes the family. While Laura uses the mirror, reflecting upon herself as well – after all, she too is a Fairchild – Ellen looks out into the room observing as if from a distance. Being only a Fairchild by marriage, Ellen stands outside the reflection to observe the family as an outsider whereas Laura has the potential to be considered a part of the group, by the family if not by herself. Ellen, who has been in the family for at least nineteen years, is still considered an outsider at times. In fact, Gretlund feels that Ellen's Virginia roots will always keep her placed outside the family to the Fairchilds (108). Actually, Ellen is both an outsider and an insider. Her Virginia roots and maiden name Dabney separate her from the great Fairchild family of the Mississippi Delta, but as the mother of the youngest generation of Fairchilds, she is very much an insider. She is raising the next generation of Fairchilds, and if she is to raise them to possess the Fairchild identity, she too must, in some ways, possess it as well. Because of this position as both insider and outsider, Ellen is willing to fight for the Fairchild unit while also understanding the plight of the non-Fairchild.

Troy carries the outsider title for multiple reasons beyond his lack of the Fairchild name. Troy is not a Delta boy; he comes from the hills of Northeast Mississippi. As overseer, he also falls outside of the Fairchild family's social class. This is seen in the fact that even while engaged to Troy, Dabney goes to dances with Dickie Boy Featherstone – a date more socially acceptable than Troy (113). George is Troy's best man because the Fairchilds think his friend Buster Daggett (also of the working class – he worked at the ice and coal) is not good enough for a Fairchild wedding. Tempe corrects Troy when he speaks unkindly about Dr. Murdoch. She tells him he is "speaking of one of our closest friends, a noble Delta doctor that has brought virtually every Fairchild in this room into the world" (240). Tempe realizes that if Troy is willing to call Dr. Murdoch names, it would make sense that he is also willing to call the Fairchilds names, and Tempe cannot allow this. Therefore, she puts Troy back in his proper social place. Tempe reminds Troy that Dr. Murdoch holds a position in effect higher than Troy's, even, one assumes, when Troy is married to Dabney.

Troy's position in the worker class is seen almost immediately in the novel. Dabney asks Laura, "Oh, Laura, *you* want me to marry Troy, don't you? *You* approve, don't you?" (105). The emphasis on *you* makes clear that others do not approve of her marrying Troy. The next time Dabney mentions her husband-to-be, she wonders if he's in from the fields (107). Ellen asks herself who Troy is, and her mental response is, "Indeed, who is Troy Flavin, beyond being the Fairchild overseer" (114). To the Fairchilds, Troy's only identity is that of overseer – worker. Dabney herself reiterates this when she thinks "Troy Flavin is the overseer" (119). She then reflects on how everyone thought the "Fairchilds would die" (119) over the fact that their daughter was willing to marry someone of the worker class. Troy's position as worker is reiterated when Ellen asks him to help her polish the silver. Ellen says to him, "Here's the polish,

here's you a rag, and you can take half these goblets. Roxie and Vi'let and Howard and all just have so much to do" (181). Ellen instructs him as if he's an employee not as her future son-in-law. She gives him half of the chore and explains that the other Fairchild employees, Roxie, Vi'let, and Howard, are busy with other things – work that she would not or does not ask her daughters to do. While the other members of the Fairchilds are busy with wedding preparation, they are not the ones Ellen references when she explains how busy everyone is; she refers to the Fairchild workers – equating Troy with them. When Dabney goes to visit her aunts Jim Allen and Primrose, she moves around the Fairchild house in which they live looking for a suitable wedding gift. Jim Allen informs her, "We've never really *seen* Troy … Not close *to* – you know" (132). As she says this, Jim Allen points to the walls of The Grove's parlor. The aunts have never seen Troy *inside*; they have only seen him outside "grown to that black [horse] Isabelle in the fields" (200). They cannot imagine Troy as an insider; he does not belong with the family in the family homes but, rather, outside working in the fields.

When polishing silver with Troy, Ellen finally sees him as a future son-in-law and not merely the overseer, and she wants to help Troy transition from outsider to insider. Ellen, who also transitioned from outsider to insider, wants to make the inclusion into the Fairchild clan an easier move for Troy. Troy begins to tell Ellen about his mother and sisters in Tishomingo County. Ellen and Troy are both originally from the hills, she from Virginia and he from northeast Mississippi, and Ellen warns Troy of life in the Delta – not to chide him but to prepare him for his life with Dabney. After two years in the Delta, Troy is confident that he has learned all there is to learn about the land and the ways of the people. He feels like he's been in the Delta long enough to no longer be considered an outsider. He says, "By now, I can't tell a bit of difference between me and any Delta people you name. There's nothing easy about the Delta

either, but it's just a matter of knowing how to handle your Negroes" (183). Ellen warns that such things will take time and that he has much to learn before he will be considered an insider: "Well, Troy, you know, if it was that at first, I believe there's more to it, and you'll be seeing there's a lot of life here yet that will take its time working out . . . You keep taking things on, and you'll see. Things still take a little time" (184). Troy believes he understands life in the Delta because he understands life in the cotton fields – he knows his job as overseer, and he knows how to manage his workers. Ellen, however, speaks not of what happens in the fields but about the social hierarchy of the Delta. Had he known the way the social system of the Delta works, he would have known how scandalous it is for the overseer to marry the daughter of the plantation owner. However, beyond that, Troy will have to learn how to live and interact within the upper-class society of the Fairchild family. Ellen, who also married into the Fairchild family, had to learn it herself, and she knows it is not as easy as Troy seems to think. The way in which Ellen talks to Troy is not the condescending way the other Fairchild women talk to him. It is not the way Tempe thinks of Ellen's manner of dressing or the way in which she decorates her house. Ellen speaks to Troy as a fellow outsider, missing the hills and getting to know the ways of the Delta. In the kitchen, Ellen speaks to Troy as a non-Fairchild preparing him to be a part of the Fairchild family by explaining to him that he has a lot left to learn about the ways of the people he works for and is marrying into.

On the night of the wedding rehearsal, Shelley notes that "Troy was sitting there – bathed and dressed in a stiff white suit, but having trouble with the hands" (284). Preparing to rehearse his wedding to the plantation owner's daughter, Troy attempts to look the part by wearing a white suit. However, the suit is stiff – as if unworn – and the Fairchilds must wait while he performs his overseer duties of dealing with the black workers who are in trouble. By the end of

the novel, Troy wears "a new seersucker suit whose stripes in the house had seemed vibrant as if lightening were playing around him, but out here he looked like any other man in an old costume" (331). His suits are new, like his status as a member of the Fairchild family. Inside Shellmound, the newness of the suits stand out through the stiffness of the white suit and vibrant colors of the seersucker stripes. However, outside the Fairchild home and in the starlight, his suit looks like the suit of any man. Outside the Fairchild home, Troy blends in with the family looking like "any other man," but inside the home and under the watchful eyes of three generations of Fairchilds, he is still an outsider trying and failing to blend in with his new family – a family of prominence and wealth. Troy, like his seersucker suit, looks like a part of Delta society outside the confines of the Fairchild homes but remains exceptional to the Fairchilds within the confines of the Shellmound home.

Shelley writes of Troy in her diary, "I think T. likes to size things up. … because T. is the one always thinking of ways in or ways out" (174). However, Troy is far from the only one looking for ways in or out. The women in the novel spend considerably more time looking for ways to be a part of the circle or to be out of the circle than does Troy. While Laura, Robbie, Ellen, and Troy have all sought access inside the wall of Fairchilds, Ellen, Robbie, Laura, Dabney and Shelley, but not Troy, have all sought ways to escape outside the confines of the Fairchild circle.

Throughout the majority of the novel, Ellen seems like such a part of the Fairchild life and ideal that it is difficult to remember she is not a born Fairchild, not a native Deltan, not even a native Mississippian. When interacting with the rest of the Fairchild family, Ellen blends in and assumes her role of matriarch to the entire family – cousins, aunts, sisters-in-law, as well as her own children. In the galleys for the novel, Welty wrote, "She was the mother to them all" (8).

Though not all of the children were her children, she mothered them as if they were. However, even the matriarch needs a chance to get outside the cluster of family members. Bachelard points out that when in search of intimacy, "We must first look for centers of simplicity in houses with many rooms" (29). When Ellen looks for simplicity and seeks refuge from the chaos, she retreats to the kitchen. While the kitchen is downstairs with the rest of the other heavily occupied rooms of the house, it seems worlds away. She uses the kitchen as her room for isolation.

While in the kitchen, Ellen is able to mentally escape and contemplate the things that have been on her mind. When baking Aunt Mashula's cake, Ellen thinks of the love and happiness George has found with Robbie, and she hopes this same love and happiness will be prevalent in the lives of Dabney and Troy. Romines points out, "Making a cake and instructing Laura establish Ellen in a continuum of female culture that enables her to think thoughts that endanger the continuum itself" (223). Thinking about the George and Robbie on the river bank the night they appalled the family, Ellen felt their behavior threatening – public hints at sexuality by Robbie may threaten the female culture of woman as homemaker. The kitchen is also the place where Ellen sees George as a man in love and not as the Fairchild hero. The narrator points out that Ellen "loved George too dearly herself to seek her knowledge of him through the family attitude, keen and subtle as that was – just as she loved Dabney too much to see her prospect without its risk, now family-deplored, around it, the happiness covered with danger" (114). While Ellen's thoughts of George in the dining room and parlor mirror the thoughts of the Fairchild clan (until Robbie's actions open her eyes later in the novel), in the kitchen she reflects on her ideas of George and is able to see him apart from the way in which the Fairchilds view him. Ellen uses the kitchen as a way to escape the Fairchild way of thinking.

Just as Ellen escapes to the kitchen, her daughters escape to their bedrooms where the Fairchild identity seems less oppressive. Their escapes are not merely physical but also mental. Shelley seeks the solitude of her room to write and to record, although angry that she does not have enough light in her room by which to read easily. India's bedroom is a place full of fantasy – providing mental escape from the Fairchild life. Upon arriving at Shellmound, Laura remembers lying in bed with India telling each other stories and hearing the baying of the dogs and fearing the escaped prisoners from Parchman. The whole house stops later that same night when India leans out her bedroom window to make a wish. Cotton lint on the lampshades and ceilings also provoke a fantastical feeling; Laura remembers it as if fairies had left the cotton there as a present "that made Vi'let moan" (96). Inside their bedrooms, the girls are able to move mentally outside the world of the Fairchilds and into a world of fiction and fairies.

The Fairchild women (with the exception of Ellen who shares her bedroom with Battle) also go to their bedrooms to reflect upon life on the inside of the Fairchild circle. Gallagher reiterates this when she writes, "In your private lair . . . you can replenish your inner self, attend to you most personal business, and feel truly at home in your home" (138). Shelley sneaks away from the family to write in her diary upstairs in her bedroom. She writes:

> Why doesn't it dawn on T. F. that none of the Fairchilds are smart, the way he means smart? Only now and then one of us is gifted. . . . We never wanted to be smart, one by one, but all together we have a wall, we are self-sufficient against people that come up knocking, we are solid to the outside. Does the world suspect? that we are all very private people? I think one by one we're all more lonely than private and more lonely than self-sufficient. (172)

Shelley realizes the Fairchilds have built a wall around themselves and rely solely upon themselves for everything. Shelley acknowledges in her journal what Robbie later tells the Fairchilds: "You're just loving yourselves in each other" (254). Shelley recognizes how lonely life inside the Fairchild circle can be when they are relying on themselves and loving themselves over and over again. Despite this loneliness, Shelley fears tearing down the protective wall of the Fairchilds and letting outsiders in. She writes, "I cannot think of any way of loving that would not fight the world, just speak to the world. Papa and Mama do not fight the world. They have let it in. Did they ever even lock a door. … The whole Delta is in and out of this house" (174). Shelley has always been a Fairchild, and she cannot imagine a way to live or love outside of the protective wall the Fairchilds have created for themselves. She equates the world outside with danger and pain, and she cannot understand not fighting against the danger and pain. Her frustration with her parents for letting in the world (i.e. Troy) without even locking a door stems from her fear for Dabney walking into a life of pain and trouble with Troy. It is the same fear that made Shelley – known for being a tomboy – unable to walk the trestle the day of the near accident. Shelley's entry in her diary indicates that she (at this point in the novel) would rather stay within the Fairchild protective wall than venture outside of it.

Ellen seems less sure about where she'd like to be – inside or outside the circle. Later in the novel when Ellen wakes from her faint, she is lying on a settee in the dining room. She notices that she is surrounded by a ring of Fairchilds. She does not indicate specific faces, but she lies amidst a protective wall of Fairchilds. Robbie, standing back against the china cabinet observing the Fairchilds, notes that this is "the way of the Fairchilds, the way of the world" (257). Shellmound, especially the dining room where the family gathers on a regular basis, is the world to the Fairchilds. When Ellen foresees danger coming she sees it in the image of every one

running out of the dining room all at once as if there were a fire at the gin (251-2). In Ellen's mind, the Fairchilds are always all gathered in the dining room. They go out from "*this* room" (257 emphasis added) to a fire and wars and duels. It is unclear whether or not Ellen desires or fears this going outward by the Fairchilds. She seems conflicted between wanting them all to stay and the urgency for them to enter the outside world.

The back porch serves as a place from which the Fairchilds to look out, not in. Laura remembers drinking from the water cooler and looking out over the back yard. Laura, now inside the circle, is able to look out. It is on the back porch that Laura presents George his pipe as a gift —the gift being not his pipe but her love. Upon receiving the gift, George tells Laura that she is growing into a "real little Fairchild" (298). Laura has been given the choice to belong to the Fairchilds, whether she chooses to accept it or not. George's affirmation that Laura is transforming into a Fairchild gives her the option of choosing the people of her mother – whom she loves and misses but also is gone – or her father – whom she loves and misses and who is waiting for her back in Jackson. Laura's giving of the gift to George is the first intimate encounter between the two of them in which Laura does not seem fearful – earlier she backed out of the library after seeing his glare, and she feared walking between George and Ellen at the foot of the stairs. Laura's vision of George is created through what she has heard of him, not what she has experienced or seen through the majority of her time at Shellmound. George has been built up as the family hero – yes, who has married beneath himself, but the hero nonetheless. On the porch, Laura sees George not from the Fairchild perspective but from a personal perspective. She does not fear him or stand in awe of him as she had previously in the novel. The lore surrounding him has worn off, and Laura sees George differently. Seeing George through her own eyes and not the eyes of the Fairchilds allows Laura to be happy when he appreciates the gift and is

willing to ask her for something at another time. And contrary to George's statement that Laura is growing up to be a "real little Fairchild," her actions in giving him the gift were the most un-Fairchildlike. No other Fairchild gives a gift without obligation or pomp and circumstance. No other Fairchild offers up love without asking for something in return. In fact, Laura notes the Fairchild's way of love her first night: "They looked with shining eyes upon their kin, and all their abundance of love, as if it were a devilment, was made reckless and inspired or was belittled in fun, though never, so far, was it said out" (104-5). Laura's act of love is unlike any love shown by blood Fairchilds throughout the novel. While George sees Laura as a Fairchild, Laura's actions separate her from the typical Fairchild behavior and thus the Fairchild identity. What is important is that Laura sees this, even if George does not. Laura is given the choice to be inside the circle or outside it, and ultimately she chooses to be outside it.

Laura is not the only one who has chosen to be outside the Fairchild circle. Virgie Lee Fairchild, Denis' wife and Maureen's mother, also chose to be outside of the Fairchild circle, and though she still lives in Fairchilds, she has cut all of her ties with the Fairchild family. Virgie Lee abandons Maureen along with the rest of the Fairchilds. Though Maureen looks like Virgie Lee, she has the Fairchild's blonde hair and last name; she is the sole child of the Fairchild hero and remains a constant reminder of him. Tempe hints that Virgie Lee was unhappy with her husband, who "threw himself away in drink" (205), long before he died. Tempe ponders what life would be like had Denis left Virgie Lee and allowed her to marry "somebody she would better have tried to live with" (205) – implying that Virgie Lee had trouble living with Denis and did not care enough to try and have a happy life with him. Virgie Lee seems to have snapped. The Fairchilds point out that Virgie Lee is "not of sound mind and would have none of Marmion" (119) – for clearly, no one who *is* of sound mind would choose to live outside the Fairchild circle

or would reject the Fairchild home to which she held uncontested ownership. The Fairchilds tell Mr. Rondo that Virgie Lee never comes out, but that does not seem to be the case. When Virgie Lee walks to church the morning after the wedding, Laura is the first to spot her. She had to have seen Virgie Lee "out" in Fairchilds before in order to recognize her. Clearly Virgie Lee gets about in Fairchilds, but she does not come "out" to the Fairchild homes to visit her child or her deceased husband's family.

When the girls see Virgie Lee, Laura calls her "Aunt Virgie Lee," giving her the kinship title, though Virgie Lee ran off into Fairchilds when Maureen (who is the same age as Laura) was a baby, and Laura would have too been a baby and thus would not remember a time when Virgie Lee served as her aunt or as anything other than the wild woman who had cut off ties with the family. That morning, "Shelley slowed the car down and spoke to Virgie Lee. Usually she would have tried to pass without seeming to notice -- the wild way Virgie Lee looked in the face, her cheeks painted red as if she were going to meet somebody, and in the back, with her hair tied up in a common rope" (324). Had Laura not recognized Virgie Lee, Shelley would have ignored her and continued on their journey. However, Laura, being unaccustomed to living in Fairchilds or to ignoring the outcast family member, cries out when she sees Virgie Lee forcing Shelley to stop the car. Virgie Lee, used to the Fairchilds ignoring her, wants nothing to do with the car of Fairchilds. She tells them, "Go away! Go away! Don't tamper with me! Go home to your weddings and palaver" (324). Virgie Lee rejects the Fairchild lifestyle, its grand celebrations, and idle conversation. Nine years after leaving, she still stands firmly outside of the Fairchilds circle; she wants no more part of the Fairchild family than they want of her.

While Virgie Lee, having gone crazy, is allowed to roam the streets of Fairchilds, the other Fairchild women are less free. Twice in the novel, Fairchild women are scorned for

walking too far from home or too far to get home. According to McDowell, "A range of individuals and particular social groups are excluded from the widest spectrum of access to public spaces and arenas … on the grounds of their need for protection from the hurly-burly of the public arena" (150). When Robbie walks to Shellmound from the store and Ellen walks to Brunswick-town, they both remove themselves from the protection of their husbands and other male family members. They fight against a limited access to public spaces and escape outside the protective wall of Fairchilds, but are criticized for this.

Robbie, angry at George for not coming to find her at the Fairchilds store, decides to walk from Fairchilds to Shellmound. She took the road with the least shade because "if she was going back to George in the hot sun, then she was going in the hot sun" (233). While she walked in the heat of mid-day, she contemplated the ways of women in the Delta and in the Fairchild family. After thinking of what the Fairchild women were like and how they begged and pleaded for their men to give them everything, Robbie realizes she was not that kind of woman (233). Robbie only wants George to give her love – to love her individually and apart from the love he gives to his family.

Robbie knows George will be mad when he finds out that she walked from town, and she expects it will upset him that he made her so angry she was willing to do so in the noon heat. After Robbie arrives at Shellmound and confronts the Fairchild family, George arrives home to find Robbie with her back against the china cabinet amidst the Fairchilds. After Ellen comes to from her faint, Shelley offers Robbie a bath – the first kindness shown her by the Fairchilds since her arrival. According to Hardy, "Ellen, who retains enough of the attitude of an outsider always to see (or to have to see, to figure out consciously) a little more than the others, understands also what it meant for Robbie" (83). When she wakes from her faint, she empathizes with Robbie and

seeks to mend the conflict between the Fairchilds and Robbie. When George asks Robbie how she got to Shellmound, Ellen answers, "Do you know that she walked from Fairchilds? … And nobody's even offered her a bath till Shelley just now, or a place to lie down. Robbie, you lie down *here*" (259). George responds with a glare and, "What? You fought the mosquitoes clear from Fairchilds? I ought to whip you all the way home" (259).[30] George's response was exactly what she had hoped it would be. She knew he would disapprove of her walking from town and that his disapproval and scolding would reveal to her and to his family how much he truly loves Robbie. Outside of Shellmound, Robbie's safety can be threatened, and this is what causes George to react – much like the train threatening Maureen's safety on the trestle had caused him to react.

Unlike Robbie, when Ellen leaves to walk to Brunswick-town, she takes an umbrella to shield her from the beating sun. Her journey is not one to prove a point or to gain a proclamation of love and concern. Ellen's journey to Brunswick-town is more practical but still provides her the opportunity of freedome. She does not allow Roy to escort her on the trip, and she quickly escapes into thoughts about her family. She thinks of how demanding the Fairchilds are and how Dabney and George are the most so. Dabney's wedding and George's failing marriage seem to have put the most stress on Ellen and have been the most taxing. She realizes that the weariness brought upon her by the family lifts while she walks through the trees on the path toward Brunswick-town. Unlike in the kitchen (the inside place of escape for Ellen), when outside, Ellen spends only moments thinking of Dabney, George and the rest of the Fairchilds. She quickly gets lost in the scenery around her. Welty writes:

> She noticed how many little paths crisscrossed and disappeared in here, the deeper she went. Who had made them? There had been more woods left standing

> here than she had remembered. The shade was nice. Moss from the cypresses hung deep overhead now, and by the water vines like pediments and arches reached from one tree to the next. She walked abstractedly, gently moving her extended hand with the closed umbrella in it from side to side, clearing the vines and mosquitoes from her path. There were trumpet vines and passion flowers. The cypress trunks four feet thick in the water's edge stood opened like doors of tents in Biblical engravings. How still the old woods were. (156-7)

Outside of the house, Ellen is able to envelope herself in her surroundings, contemplating their existence and beauty. Welty's description seems to describe Ellen walking almost dreamlike down the path away from her home. It is when Ellen notes the quiet stillness of the woods that she becomes anxious that she has wandered too far from home and will be needed back at the house. The woods bring such a stark contrast to the "clamorous" life of the Fairchilds in Shellmound, and the stillness and quiet make Ellen anxious. Though her walk brings her peace and escape, she cannot remove herself from her role as the matriarchal head of the home, and she fears she will be needed.

It is in this motherly state of mind that Ellen meets the girl wandering in the woods trying to find the way to Memphis. When Ellen speaks to the girl, she asks, "Are you one of our people? Girl, are you lost then?" (157). If the girl is not one of "our people," then she must certainly be lost. When the girl does not come to her, Ellen says, "And if you belong somewhere, I'm going to send you back unless they're mean to you, you can't hide with me, but if you don't belong anywhere, then I'll have to think" (157). It is interesting that Ellen uses the words "if you don't belong anywhere" because though her words do not assume the girl has a place where she belongs, Ellen definitely treats her as if she must. Ellen assumes the girl is black; if the girl is not

one of the Fairchilds' "people," then she must be the "people" of a neighboring plantation. Then it does appear that Ellen realizes this girl may very well have no place where she belongs – no home to be sent back to. Ellen thinks, "[I]n here it seemed an ancient place and for a moment the girl was not a trespasser but someone who lived in the woods, a dark creature not hiding, but waiting to be seen, careless on the pottery bank" (157). Ellen does not fear this "dark creature" but appears to be intrigued by her. The way in which the Fairchilds embrace the ghosts that roam around Fairchilds, the narrator's description seems to paint the girl as ghost-like creature hiding on the bayou banks where the Indians burned their pottery before being moved off the land. Also, if this girl was not a trespasser but lived in the woods, then roles reverse and Ellen becomes the trespasser helping herself into the wooded home of the girl. Though the woods are not the girl's home (for it appears she has no home), Ellen's thoughts of the woods being the girl's home do not hinder Ellen from entering or talking authoritatively to the girl or even accusingly question her about the missing pin.

It is when the girl speaks to declare her innocence that Ellen realizes the girl is white. When the girl comes out, Ellen automatically compares the girl to her daughters (especially Dabney, as the girl is presumably around her age, and Dabney was on Ellen's mind before seeing the girl). Once Ellen realizes the girl is white, she no longer compares her to Pinchy or the other servants; she equates her to her daughters and considers the comparisons. The girl is more beautiful than her daughters, and she stands more still in obedience than her daughters. The comparison to Ellen's daughters causes her maternal instincts to reemerge and causes her to feel "like a mother to the world" (158). Ellen tells her,

> Way out here in the woods! … You'll bring mistakes on yourself that way. …
>
> You're no Fairchilds girl or Inverness girl or Round Bayou or Greenwood girl.

> You're a stranger to me. … I don't believe you even know who I am. … You're at the end of the world out here! You're purely and simply wandering in the woods. I ought to take a stick to you. (159)

Ellen, who is having an awakening of sorts, wants to see this girl experience some sort of awakening too. After the girl tells her she has not seen Ellen's pin, Ellen reaches out and grabs the girl's hand telling her, "I wasn't speaking about any little possession to you. I suppose I was speaking about good and bad, maybe. I was speaking about men – men, our lives. But you don't know who I am" (159). Ellen seems to want to save this beautiful girl from good, bad, and men in the same way that she wants to save Dabney from Troy Flavin. Ellen realizes that because the girl does not know who she is, she has no reason to listen to Ellen or to trust her authority. Ellen realizes that she can't save her from all the things she fears for her. Finally, with resignation Ellen tells her "I'm not stopping you" (159). The girl replies, "You couldn't stop me" (159). Ellen can no more stop this girl from roaming dangerously through strange woods than she can stop Dabney from roaming dangerously into a marriage with a man beneath her. The girl's half-smile makes Ellen feel that her words came across as "teasing and sad, final and familiar, like the advice a mother is bound to give her girls" (159). The half-smile is final as it ends the intimate moment Ellen was seeking to have with this girl who was not her daughter but was a stranger – homeless and wandering. Once the intimate moment has fled, Ellen steps back, and tells her, "It was when I saw you were – were a stranger – my heart nearly failed me, for some reason" (160). As Ellen stands in a familiar wood entranced by its beauty and curious about its history, she encounters this girl and becomes entranced by the girl's beauty and her own curiosity about her background. This wandering stranger – an outsider, exotic – startles Ellen out of her Fairchild-centered world. She stands, not as a Fairchild (for this girl does not know who Ellen is or the

importance of the Fairchild family), but as a mother. She finds herself able to say to this wandering outsider the things she has not said or been able to say to her own daughter. The schism between the outsider and the inside world of the Fairchilds allows Ellen the space in which she can say the things she's not been able to say, to mother the way she has not been able to mother inside the Fairchild world. Despite this, the end result was no different; Ellen's verbal pleas no more stop the girl than her silent, internal pleas to her own children stop them.

The girl finally asks the way to the main road; Ellen points her toward it, sending her on to Memphis, "the old Delta synonym for pleasure, trouble, and shame" (160). The girl leaves without turning back, and Ellen is left impacted by this chance meeting. Upon this revelation, "A whole mystery of life opened up. Ellen waited by a tree herself, as if she could not go any farther through the woods. Almost bringing terror the thought of Robbie Reid crossed her mind" (158). This is the moment when Ellen realizes this girl is without a home. She is not a servant running away from another plantation; she is a timid white girl in torn clothing roaming through the woods from and to Ellen knows not where. Ellen is reminded of Robbie Reid[31] who has left George and run away. This girl, though not Robbie, brings the run-away sister-in-law to Ellen's mind, and the terror that comes with it is the thought of Robbie encountering all the dangers Ellen fears for this girl – homeless without any circle of which to be inside or outside.

On her way home from Brunswick-town, Ellen meets George and tells him about the girl. She notes that Battle would have scolded her for walking to Brunswick-town, but she does not hesitate in telling George (166). He informs her that he ran into her on his way in to Shellmound. This knowledge jars Ellen: "Then she was speechless. It was a thing she had never learned in her life, to expect that what has come to you, come in dignity to yourself in loneliness, will yet be shared, the secret never intact" (167). It is after this initial blow, this initial invasion into what

Ellen felt was an intimate moment, that George informs her that he had sex with the girl (167). Ellen's shocked and flustered reaction seems curious. The narrator says, "Sometimes he, the kindest of them all, would say a deliberate wounding thing – as if in assurance that nothing further might then hurt you. … She glanced toward George, though she could no longer see him. A feeling of uncontrollable melancholy came over her to see him in this half-light, which had so rested her before he came out" (168). Ellen's feeling is not a passionate jealousy of wanting to be loved more intimately by George. Ellen sees this girl as one of her daughters. She realizes she is no more able to protect her own daughters from men than she was able to protect this girl from George. It is also possible that George is lying about sleeping with the girl. When Ellen meets the girl in the woods, the narrator points out, "She was dimly aware of the chimney to the overseer's house stuck up through the trees" (157). The girl is walking away from the direction of Troy's house, and more than likely, George would have seen this too. As the hero of the family, George would protect the family in any way possible; therefore, if he knew that Troy had slept with the girl, it is plausible that George lies to Ellen to protect her from the knowledge of Troy's actions, to protect Dabney from the shame and hurt of Troy's betrayal, and to protect the family from scandal. While George knows telling Ellen that he had sex with the girl may hurt Ellen, he also knows that his status as hero of the family cannot or will not be marred by this revelation. In fact, it appears Ellen tells no one else what George has told her. Whether Troy or George slept with the girl, Ellen, as a "mother to the world," feels the stab of reality in knowing that her ability to protect is limited. She tells the girl, "You'll bring mistakes on yourself" (159) without realizing that the girl has already brought mistakes on herself. It is in going outside the home that Ellen realizes she cannot mother or protect her daughters or the other children entrusted into her care.

Later in the novel, the photographer brags to the Fairchild family that he has seen a girl get killed and has the negative of it inside his bag. He says, "Know what I have in my satchel? … Train victim. I got a girl killed on the I.C. railroad. My train did it. Ladies, she was flung off in the blackberry bushes. Looked to me like she was walking up the track to Memphis and met Number 3" (307). The narrator describes the photograph taken after Ellen hears the news, "[the photograph] showed her seeing a vision of fate; surely it was the young girl of the bayou woods that was the victim this man had seen" (307). Ellen's greatest fear for her children has been realized with this girl. Homeless and alone, she has died the death that the Fairchilds were able to avoid that night on the trestle. Mr. Doolittle did not stop the train this time, and the girl was thrown violently into the blackberry bushes. The Fairchilds' story of the encounter with the train ends with an engagement; this girl's ends in death, and unlike the Fairchilds, this girl has only Ellen to mourn for her.

While outside and inside are vague at times in *Delta Wedding*, they are unclear in *The Optimist's Daughter*. Fay and her family, the Chisoms, are clear outsiders; they are outsiders from the time they enter the novel until the time they exit. Though Mount Salus society clearly considers Fay and the Chisoms as outsiders, it never considers Becky or Laurel as outsiders. However, neither Becky nor Laurel are fully insiders. Becky is not originally from Mount Salus and Laurel has chosen to live away from Mount Salus for twenty years, half of her life. In *Delta Wedding*, most of the outsider characters want to be insiders and in many ways are. In *The Optimist's Daughter* that is not the case. The outsiders do not necessarily want to be considered insiders, and when those outsiders are let inside the home, the consequences are far more lasting and destructive. Eisinger writes, "The insider here, Laurel, is the beneficiary of revelation and growth while the outsider is condemned as a desecrator and is vanquished" (25). Throughout the

novel, the dichotomy of assumed insider (Laurel) and outsider (Fay) remains intact, and at the end, Laurel leaves having changed and grown while Fay has not.

Fay clearly never entered the social realm of Mount Salus; however, her unwillingness to adapt to prescribed roles of the women within the McKelvas' social circle is not the only thing that made Fay an outsider in the novel. Fay is considered an outsider because she does not fit into the age range of the other characters in the novel. She is significantly younger than Clint and his friends; she is also younger than Laurel and the bridesmaids – Welty writes, "perhaps [Fay] was forty, and so younger than Laurel" (897). She is an outsider for being of a different time, but she is also an outsider for being of a different place. Fay is from Texas, not Mississippi. Though her grandparents lived in Mississippi and raised her parents there, Fay claims Texas. Fay tells the Dalzells, "I'm *not* from Mississippi. I'm from Texas" (904), and when they ask her how she likes Mississippi, she responds, "I guess I'm used to Texas" (904). Even after a year and a half, Fay has not grown accustomed to life in Mississippi. When the Chisoms leave to go back to Texas, Fay jumps at the chance to go with them and explains, "I'd just like to see somebody that can talk my language" (942). Fay wants to be where she does not feel like an outsider and with people who consider her an insider.

Even after Clint McKelva married Fay and they moved into the McKelva house, no one in Mount Salus society considered Fay an insider. The narrator points out, "It was still incredible to Laurel that her father, at nearly seventy, should have let anyone new, a beginner, walk in on his life, that he had even agreed to pardon such a thing" (897). Laurel cannot understand why her father would allow an outsider inside his life. Laurel wonders where her father found Fay, and he explains that he met her at the Southern Bar Association on the coast. Fay worked in the Gulf

Coast Hotel as a typist. A month after meeting her, Clint brought her home to Mount Salus and married her (897).

With Clint gone, Fay is even more an outsider than before. Fay seems to not mind that she is an outsider in Mount Salus; she does, however, seem overly sensitive to being considered an insider in the McKelva family. Laurel remembers Fay calling Becky her rival (976), and this can clearly be seen throughout the novel. She has moved Becky's desk into the sewing room, and she has closed up the sewing room as if it were a large closet. She gets angry when Clint wakes up from the surgery and asks Laurel, "What's your mother have to say about me" (890). Fay calls everybody "hon" and does not use first names, save Becky's which she uses throughout the novel. Fay asserts her priority by exclaiming to Mr. Pitts, "I'm Mrs. McKelva now" (911). When she arrives to her home to find all of Becky's friends, she wants to know why they are in *her* house (913) and she asks, "What does Becky's Garden Club have to do with me?" (914). She wants to make sure that everyone from Clint to the people of Mount Salus remembers she is Mrs. McKelva; Becky is dead, and Fay is the one living and the one they should acknowledge. The night she arrives back at the McKelva home, Fay tells everyone, "Well, it's evermore unfair. I haven't got anybody to count on but me, myself, and I" (914). All of Becky's friends and Laurel's friends are there to comfort Laurel; none of these people consider Fay worthy of their sympathy or pity, and she wants to remind them of who she is. In her final confrontation with Laurel, Fay says that Becky died "a crazy" (988); belittling Becky makes Fay feel superior.

Fay has little use for things that are old; she clearly prefers new things. She completely covered the old, mahogany bed that she and Clint slept in with peach satin (918); the bed no longer looks to Laurel like Clint's old bed – the one he shared with Becky. Fay despises the grandfather clock that chimes on the hour and half hour, and the last thing she says to the

McKelva friends and Laurel before leaving for Texas is, “Oh how I hate that old striking clock! … It’s the first thing I’m going to get rid of” (944). The clock, which has sentimental value to Laurel, means nothing to Fay. Fay sees it as a nuisance. While her husband lies in the hospital bed dying, Fay buys new, green shoes and hopes that the beauty of these new shoes will convince Clint to get out of bed and go dancing with her. Fay insists the burial location for Judge McKelva be in the new part of the cemetery, but her reasons for this have less to do with putting Clint in what she sees as the nicer part of the cemetery and more to do with not burying him with Becky. Fay tells Laurel, “How could the biggest fool think I was going to bury my husband with his old wife? He’s going in the new part” (937). The new part of the cemetery is the antithesis of Becky’s grave; Laurel thinks “It was like being driven to the other side of the moon” (937). Becky is buried in the McKelva plot with all of Clint’s family; Clint had planted his favorite camellia, *Chandlerii Elegans*, on Becky’s grave. It had grown large and was beautifully in bloom. But the McKelva section of the cemetery represented all the things that made Fay feel like an outsider in the McKelva family: old Mount Salus, gardening, and mainly, Clint’s life with Becky.

Becky, however, is not Fay’s only rival. While Laurel may not acknowledge it, she too is Fay’s rival. Fay’s marriage to Clint was one in which Laurel did not play a major role. Fay met Laurel at the wedding, and they did not see each other again until the trip to New Orleans to visit Dr. Courtland. Fay clearly does not want Laurel in her life, and the daughter’s presence is an intrusion on the life Fay shared alone with her husband. When Laurel flew down for the wedding, Fay told her, “It wasn’t any use in you bothering to come so far” (898). Laurel came so far because she loved her father. Eighteen months later, in the hospital when Judge McKelva gets out of surgery, Fay tells Laurel, “No point in you staying just because the doctor said so” (891).

In the galleys of the novel, Fay follows this statement with, “If you still had a husband, you could call him up. I bet he could get you out of it” (Galleys 12-13). Fay uses this opportunity not only to inform Laurel that she is not needed or wanted but also to hurt her by reminding her of Phil’s absence. In the final version, Laurel informs Fay that she is there because she wants to be and because her father will need her.

Clint McKelva is in the hospital more than three weeks, and almost every night, Fay tells Laurel again that she need not be there. Laurel notes, “Her flattery and her disparagement sounded just alike” (898). In an earlier version of the story, Laurel and Fay return to Mount Salus to find the Chisoms already there with the people of Mount Salus and Judge McKelva’s body. Fay introduces Laurel as “Becky’s daughter” (“Baltimore” 41), not in relation to Clint at all. In a later version of the story, Welty writes, “Mama, this is Judge and Becky’s daughter,” said Fay, “But a stranger to me!” (“Baltimore” 41). In this version, Fay dismisses Laurel’s connection to Judge McKelva by adding that Laurel is a stranger to her. When Fay introduces Laurel to her brother, she says, “Bubba, this is Becky’s daughter. Her real home is Chicago and that’s where she’s going back” (“Baltimore” 43). Again, she denies Laurel relation to Judge McKelva and a claim to Mount Salus or to the McKelva house as her home. Fay declares that Chicago is Laurel’s home, and in saying it is “where she’s going back” Fay makes clear how unwelcomed Laurel is in her life and house. Though Welty debated these introductions of Laurel by Fay, they speak to the feeling that remains in the final version: Fay does not want a relationship with Laurel; she does not acknowledge Laurel’s relationship to Clint, and she wishes Laurel would quickly depart for Chicago and out of her life.

Becky and Laurel are a part of Clint McKelva’s life with which Fay wants no part. Wife and daughter leave little room for a new wife, and those who consider Clint, Becky, and Laurel

as the McKelva family unit push Fay outside it. This is unacceptable to Fay. For her, the McKelva family unit consists of her and Clint. While she is willing to concede her position as outsider in Mount Salus social society, she is unwilling to accept a position outside the McKelva family unit. By dismissing Becky and Laurel, Fay strives to make clear her position as Mrs. Clint McKelva.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the public scenes of the parlor funeral. Just as Laurel was horrified by the open casket, the townspeople of Mount Salus were horrified by the arrival of the Chisoms. However, Laurel is less threatened by the presence of the Chisoms than are the residents of Mount Salus. She accepts them in the same manner she accepts a tipsy Major Bullock, a nosy Mrs. Pease, a bossy Tennyson Bullock, and a crazy Verna Longmeier. Jane Hinton points out, "The funeral is attended by a group typifying the community and the kinship they share. There is room for those who are not strictly the judge's 'own kind' …. Together they maintain a sense of values and patterns" (129). Laurel understands the necessity of allowing these outsiders access to her father's body. She knows the Chisoms are less socially refined than the townspeople of Mount Salus, but their actions are not any more appalling (as Adele Courtland also points out). However, this is far from how the people of Mount Salus see the Chisoms. The Chisoms are outsiders who threaten the standard of decorum set by those of the Mount Salus society because they are oblivious to any sort of social standard.

The Chisoms appear at the home the morning of the funeral. Adele Courtland warns Laurel with a simple "Polly" before the family walks into the house. "Everyone turned, and those seated stood up, as two equally fat women and a man walked past Miss Adele into the parlor" (922). Once they enter the home, they look at Judge McKelva and then introduce themselves. Mrs. Chisom says, "I'm Mrs. Chisom from Madrid, Texas. I'm Wanda Fay's mother, … And

this is some of my other children – Sis, from Madrid, Texas, and Bubba, from Madrid, Texas. We got a few others that rather not come in" (922). In her introductions, Mrs. Chisom reveals a few important points regarding the Chisoms as outsiders. First, she not only claims Madrid, Texas, for herself, but she claims it for Sis and Bubba as well, even before she claims Fay as her daughter. She secures her outsider status as soon as she enters the door. Second, Mrs. Chisom mentions that some of the family from Madrid, Texas, would rather stay outside than come in. She sets up a clear dichotomy between outside and inside. Unlike some of their family, Mrs. Chisom, Sis, and Bubba are all willing to try to break the barrier between outside and inside. Though Bubba is willing to come inside the home, he makes clear that he intends to leave shortly. He says, "Well, if you're wondering how long it took us, I made it from Madrid in close on to eight hours, … Crossed the river at Vicksburg. And we're going to have to turn around and go right back" (923). He asks Wendell to get Fay and bring her downstairs. He says, "She better hurry if she wants to see us," and repeats, "we're gonna have to turn right around in a minute and start back to Madrid" (924). While the Chisoms have just driven eight hours, and in returning will have to drive eight hours more, Bubba is anxious to leave Mount Salus, Mississippi, where he is considered an outsider.

Fay's family is also an outsider in Fay's life. In the hospital, she had told Laurel they were all dead.

> My family? … None of 'em living. That's why I ever left Texas and came to Mississippi. We may not have had much, out in Texas, but we were always so close. Never had any secrets from each other, like some families. Sis was just like my twin. My brothers were all so unselfish! After Papa died, we all gave up everything for Mama, of course. Now that she's gone, I'm glad we did. Oh, I

> wouldn't have run off and left anybody that needed me. Just to call myself an artist and make a lot of money. (898)

Fay lies about her family being alive and about why she left Texas and came to Mississippi. She takes a jab at Laurel for running off to Chicago to become "an artist and make a lot of money," but she had run off to the Gulf Coast to become a typist and to meet a man who makes a lot of money. Fay also lies about how close she is to her family. When the family shows up in Mount Salus, she cries, "Who told *them* to come?" (934). Later in the garden, Mrs. Pease asks the women, "Did you hear her snub her sister? Refused to cry on her" (949), and Tennyson Bullock points out, "Why, Fay declared right in front of old Mrs. Chisom and all that she wished her mother hadn't come!" (950). Neither during her married life, in New Orleans, nor after Clint dies, does Fay want anything to do with her family. The only member of her family she cares about is DeWitt, a brother who stayed in Madrid, Texas, instead of coming to see her for her husband's funeral (942). When Laurel asks Fay why she lied about her family, Fay evades the question, retorting, "If I did, that's what everybody else does…Why shouldn't I?" (943). While Fay in no way sufficiently answers Laurel's question, she subtly aligns herself with Laurel who had similarly abandoned her Mount Salus family and has perhaps lied to herself about it. Fay seems ashamed of the Texas Chisoms, outsiders who do not belong in Mount Salus.

While Fay also does not fit in Mount Salus, neither does she show any desire to share a home with her family. Fay escaped her family in Madrid, Texas, apparently for an independent life on the Gulf Coast. She does not seem to have any emotional or psychological connections with Texas that would make it a home to her. Mount Salus also is not home to her. Unlike Becky, who never let go of "up home," her childhood life in West Virginia, Fay easily lets go of her life in Texas with her family. Even when Fay returns to Texas with her family after the

funeral, she stays only three days before returning to Mount Salus. She has lived in Mount Salus only for a year and a half, and she remains outside the Mount Salus social realm, despite having the McKelva last name. But Fay now owns the McKelva house, though it is not her home either. Dovey points out, "Paralleling the distinction between house and home is the distinction between the house as property and the home as appropriated territory. … Home as appropriation … implies a relationship that is rooted in the experiences of everyday life over a long period of time" (53-4). The McKelva house on Main Street is a piece of property – a possession – to Fay, and she flaunts her ownership throughout the novel. She returns to Mount Salus from New Orleans and asks, "What are all these people doing in my house" (913); she tells Major Bullock, "I sure do know whose house this is" (940), and she tells Laurel, "I'll have you remember it's my house now, and I can do what I want to with it" (988). Fay has no relationship with the house; she has not lived there long enough to have formed a bond with the house. She also has no connection to the possessions in the home. After arguing with Laurel over a breadboard that Laurel's now-deceased husband made for her mother Becky, Fay tells her, "Take it! … It'll give me one thing less to get rid of" (992). Fay has no intentions of holding on to the possessions in the McKelva home because they hold no meaning or importance to her. The reality is that Fay has no home. She carries no experiential relationship with any place or person. Her homelessness differs from that of the girl in *Delta Wedding* because Fay does have a house, but she is as equally void of a home as is the girl in Welty's first novel. In *The Optimist's Daughter* – a novel about a person's connections with people and places – Fay is the only homeless character. Once Clint McKelva dies, Fay has no meaningful relationship with any one in Mount Salus or any one in her family. She takes the most comfort from strangers in the waiting room in New Orleans, the Dalzells, a family as plain but honest as her own. The women in the garden after the funeral

debate whether or not Fay will stay. While the question is left unanswered, Fay's previous behavior implies that she will not stay but will continue to wander from place to place, perhaps searching for a home.

Though the Chisoms and Fay are by far the most obvious outsiders in the novel, they are not the only ones. When Tennyson Bullock complains that Clint could have found a wife in Mount Salus, Adele Courtland reminds her that Becky was not from Mount Salus either (953). Both of Clint's wives were outsiders, in a sense. Mount Salus society welcomed Becky with open arms, and she became a central figure in the social life of the town. Though the people of Mount Salus saw Becky as an insider, she never saw herself in that light. For the entirety of her adult life lived in Mount Salus, Becky referred to West Virginia as "up home" and considered herself a West Virginian mountaineer. It is Becky's feeling as outsider that makes the burial location of both Becky and Clint saddening. As noted in chapter one, when Becky's youngest brother, Sam, came to the funeral, he stood over her grave and said, "She's a long way from West Virginia" (976). Indeed Becky had come a long way from West Virginia, but in that distance, she had created a new home with her new family – her husband and daughter. While Becky could have made an Addie Bundren-like request for her family to journey to West Virginia to bury her, she did not. As much as she loved "up home," she loved Clint and Laurel more, and building a life in Mount Salus with them proved it. Becky's burial in Mount Salus is painful for her brother, but it is not so painful for the reader – a Mount Salus burial makes sense. However, with Fay's refusal to allow Clint to be buried with Becky, she now lies in a cemetery with her husband's ancestors but without the husband she loved who also linked her to those ancestors. Becky is buried both away from her home in West Virginia and outside the family for whom she created a home in Mount Salus.[32]

Becky is not the only member of the McKelva family that can be seen as an outsider. Mount Salus knows nothing of Laurel's life in Chicago. People in Mount Salus still refer to her as Laurel McKelva, and her friends still consider themselves "the bridesmaids," even though it has been decades since Laurel's wedding and almost as long since she's been widowed. No one asks Laurel about her work or life in Chicago. The one person who normally would ask, her father, does not feel well enough to inquire. "His old curiosity would have prompted a dozen specific questions about how she was managing to stay here, what was happening up in Chicago, who had given her her latest commission, when she would have to go. … Her father left his questions unasked" (893). The people of Mount Salus do not care about her life in Chicago; they appear bitter that she left and hopeful they can make her stay. Tennyson Bullock tells Laurel that "daughters need to stay put, where they can keep a better eye on us old folks" (919). Major Bullock questions how much Laurel knew of her father and his life in Mount Salus when he says, "Honey, what do you mean? Honey, you were away. You were sitting up yonder in Chicago, drawing pictures" (931). When Laurel explains to the women in her mother's garden that she must get back to work, Tennyson dismisses it with, "Back to work. … That girl's had more now than she can say grace over. And she's going back to that life of labor when she could just as easily give it up. Clint's left her a grand hunk of money" (951). The fact that Laurel might enjoy her work never crosses Tennyson's mind; she treats Laurel's life in Chicago as if it were mere work. Mrs. Pease adds, "Laurel is who should have saved him from that nonsense. Laurel shouldn't have married a naval officer in wartime. Laurel should have stayed home after Becky died. He needed him somebody *in* that house, girl" (953). Though Mrs. Pease's words are harsh, she verbalizes what everyone in Mount Salus is thinking. They all believe that Laurel should not have left Mount Salus and moved to Chicago or that she should have moved back home when

her mother died. She should have never married Phil, an outsider and a Northerner. Her life in Chicago is outside the understanding of the people of Mount Salus, and they either ignore that it exists, use it as a tool to hurt Laurel, or dismiss it by asking her to give it up.

Laurel and Becky's inability to keep outsiders out of their home has caused its ruin. Laurel tells Fay that Becky predicted her coming. The narrator elaborates:

> Experience did, finally, get set into its right order, which is not always the order of other people's time. Her mother had suffered in life every symptom of having been betrayed, and it was not until she had died, and the protests of memory came due, that Fay had ever tripped in from Madrid, Texas. It was not until that later moment, perhaps, that her father himself had ever dreamed of Fay. For Fay was Becky's own dread. What Becky had felt, and had been afraid of, might have existed right here in the house all the time, for her. Past and future might have changed places, in some convulsion of the mind, but that could do nothing to impugn the truth of the heart. Fay could have walked in early as well as late, she could have come at any time at all. She was coming. (988)

Becky, once her illness had taken over her, calls Clint a liar when he tells her he will take her "up home" (974). Clint's inability to take Becky "up home" in her final years pains her, but she is also pained by the knowledge that Clint will remarry and bring somebody new into the family and into the home he had built with Becky and Laurel. To deny Becky of both homes is unimaginable and angering for her. Becky's feeling in the last days of her life when she thought she was neither in West Virginia nor the home in Mount Salus mirrors her fear of the destruction of her home. Her final words to Laurel, "You could have saved your mother's life. But you stood by and wouldn't intervene" (975), foresee Laurel's behavior when Clint marries Fay and brings

her into their home in Mount Salus. Laurel, there for the wedding, literally "stood by and wouldn't intervene." These are also Laurel's actions in the hospital when Fay grabs a hold of Judge McKelva and prompts his death. Laurel is there too late to intervene, to keep Fay from attacking her father.[33] Laurel is furious and thinks of how it would stand up in court, but beyond asking Fay what she was trying to do in the hospital room, Laurel never acts on prosecuting Fay – legally or socially. Laurel stood by and allowed Fay into the home on Main Street in Mount Salus and she allowed Fay to deliver the final blow to the home created by Clint, Becky, and herself, when she is unable to stop Fay from attacking Clint and ending his life. Becky knew Fay was coming, and the prediction of Fay was also a prediction of the destruction to the home she built with Clint and Laurel.

With regard to home as a construct by family, *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* – the conflict between insider and outsider pervades both novels. In fact, Core writes, "Place, whether the interior of a house or the exterior aspects of the outer world …, is the vehicle through which action, the driving motion of plot, is revealed. Place is not mere setting in the sense of a static background but an essential constituent in … enveloping action" (11). This dichotomy of insider versus outsider in many ways does carry the actions and revelations of both novels. In *Delta Wedding*, outsiders who are given access to the family homes either threaten or challenge the Fairchild identity. Laura, who by blood is a Fairchild insider, chooses not to embrace the Fairchild identity or their family homes. The ideal Fairchild identity that the Fairchilds instill in family members inside the homes and that they display to the Fairchilds society is no longer blindly accepted by the younger generation of Fairchilds or the spouses of the adult generation of Fairchilds. In *The Optimist's Daughter*, the dichotomy between outside and inside has pulled down the idea of home that Laurel assumed existed when she arrived back

in Mount Salus for her father's funeral. While the line is not clearly drawn between outsiders and insiders, there is a constant struggle to be in or out of the circle, as Laura explains in *Delta Wedding* (161).

CHAPTER FOUR: LEAVING AND RETURNING HOME

In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty writes about traveling both away from and back to home. She writes, "Through travel I first became aware of the outside world; it was through travel that I found my own introspective way into becoming a part of it" (918). It was through travel that Welty learned about the world and her place in it, and it is a way in which her characters learn about the world and themselves. Leaving home, for a short trip or forever, also changes our view of home, of the people at home, and of ourselves. There may be an excitement as well as sorrow in the parting. Of leaving home, Welty writes:

> Taking trips tore all of us up inside, for they seemed, each journey away from home, something that might have been less selfishly undertaken, or something that would test us, or something that had better be momentous, to justify such a leap into the dark. The torment and guilt – the torment of having the loved one go, the guilt of being the loved one gone – comes into my fiction as it did and does into my life. (*Stories* 937)

That torment and guilt that comes from leaving home can be seen throughout both *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*. Garrett echoes this when he says, "We knew our past … We could love it or we could hate it or both at once; but we could not easily leave it. Or, if we did manage to move on, as many did, we left our hearts behind in our home place, often feeling a little ashamed of ourselves as if we had failed in our bounden duty" (30). The deep sense of place and the connection to its people makes leaving difficult for those who desire to do so. Welty also writes about returning home, "Back on Congress Street, when my father unlocked the door of our closed-up, waiting house, I rushed ahead into the airless hall and stormed up the stairs, pounding the carpet of each step with both hands ahead of me, and putting my face right

down into the cloud of the dear dust of our long absence. I was welcoming ourselves back" (*Stories* 913). There is joy in the returning just as there is torment and guilt in the leaving. Throughout both novels, the characters that leave home and later make the journey back home learn and grow in the process. They gain a better understanding of their own identity and that identity's relationship to their home. Welty explains that journeys "changed something in my life: each trip made its particular revelation, though I could not have found words for it" (*Stories* 914). The same is true for the characters that travel both in the leaving and the returning home.

Delta Wedding begins with a journey away from home. Laura's father brought her to Yazoo City and put her aboard the Yellow Dog, the Yazoo-Delta train. In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty writes that it is not "surprising to me that when I made my first attempt at a novel, I entered its world – that of the mysterious Yazoo-Mississippi Delta – as a child riding there on a train" (914). The entirety of *Delta Wedding* is, essentially, an account of Laura's visit to the Delta for her cousin's wedding. Just as Welty had learned and grown through her travels, Laura finds her own way of being a part of the world as part of a journey, one of the oldest themes in myth and story in the world. She comes to realize where her home is and what it means to her. Welty writes, "Laura McRaven, who was nine years old, was on her first journey alone. She was going up from Jackson to visit her mother's people, the Fairchilds, at their plantation named Shellmound, at Fairchilds, Mississippi" (91). As Laura's train carries her from Yazoo City to Fairchilds, she notices the scenery and how different the Delta is from what she knows. John Edward Hardy points out, "Certain pertinent, practical facts stick in Laura's mind. She knows where she came from and where she is going and why. She is conscious of time – and her reality in it – she has been here before" (79). While Laura has made many trips to the Delta, it is unclear whether these trips were on this train or were in the family car. It is clear, though,

that this is Laura's first trip away from home alone, and her observations and "practical facts" seemed heightened by the fact that she is alone on this journey.

Though many of the characters in *Delta Wedding* physically leave or return home, old Aunt Shannon, in her dementia, is able to mentally return home, that is, to a time in her life when the men in her life and in her family were not dead. While joggling with her cousins, Laura remembers her previous visits to Shellmound, and she reflects: "But boys and men, girls and ladies all, the old and the young of the Delta kin – even the dead and the living, for Aunt Shannon – were alike – no gap opened between them" (102). Laura comprehends first that Aunt Shannon sees no gap between the living and the dead and, second, that all Fairchilds are alike. As the novel progresses, Aunt Mac becomes irritated with Aunt Shannon's lack of rational memory. While Aunt Mac is forced to remain a part of the current family unit, Aunt Shannon is able to leave the confines of the present by conversing with the dead, confusing living family members with those of another generation.

> Aunt Shannon now, with her access to their soldier brothers Battle, George, and Gordon, as well as to James killed only thirty-three years ago in the duel, to her husband Lucian Miles and even to Aunt Mac's husband Duncan Laws, was dwelling without shame in happiness and superiority over her sister. (207-8)

Aunt Mac calls Shannon vain for getting her times confused and treats her as if she were choosing to live in a time long since past, but this is involuntary, for only Aunt Shannon's dementia gives her access to generations past and present. She is able to go back to the home she shared with her husband, with a younger Aunt Mac, and with Mac's husband. Aunt Mac is jealous, for she must live in the present without her husband and the other family members who are now dead, escaping to the past only in conscious memory, while Aunt Shannon is allowed to

live mentally in the past. What Aunt Mac fails to see is what Welty points out in *One Writer's Beginnings*:

> Of course the greatest confluence of all is that which makes up the human memory – the individual human memory. . . . Here time, also, is subject to confluence. The memory is a living thing – it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives – the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead. (*Stories* 948).

Aunt Mac either does not dwell on her memories or regards them with regret as irretrievable parts. Mere memories seem second rate to her when compared to her sister's ability to relive them as if they are happening in the present. Each time Aunt Shannon's mind slips, she returns home, leaving her sister trapped in the present.

The physical journeys of leaving or returning home that the other characters take are even more revealing of their identities and their ideas of home. George and Robbie have left their homes in Fairchilds and moved to Memphis. While they seek to create a home in Memphis, they have yet to do so. Robbie and George moved to Memphis after they were married for George to practice law (128). George's leaving home to live in Memphis frustrates Battle, who is left the lone Fairchild man to deal with the plantation in Fairchilds. He says to Mr. Rondo, "I suppose you've met at some time or other my brother George … Fooling with practicing law in Memphis now – we're hoping he'll give it up and move back" (145). When Robbie returns to Shellmound, Battle begins to yell at the absent George for not being there. He is mad at George for not being in the dining room to help the family fight Robbie Reid, but more importantly, he is mad that George has left the Delta – an action that is representative to Battle of George breaking away

from the clan and leaving the family. George's abandonment leaves Battle angry and his family tormented by "having the family member go" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 94).

In his turn, George is pained, although not necessarily angry, by Robbie leaving him. Robbie is pregnant and angry that a short time before George proved he cares more about the Fairchilds than for her and their unborn child by risking his life to save Maureen, an abandoned and mentally afflicted niece. She throws the dishes and pans out the window and leaves Memphis to return to her sister Rebel, who still lives in Fairchilds. Unlike the guilt of leaving that Welty felt, Robbie felt tormented in distressing George. She knew that leaving him would devastate him, yet she felt it would help make her point. Robbie wrecks the car right outside of Memphis, and the reader does not know how she actually got to Fairchilds. Robbie first appears in Fairchilds at the store. She is angry when she leaves Memphis, and while she sits in Fairchilds store, she is still furious with him. She angrily sits on a stool in the store hoping he will intuitively know she is there and come after her. She thinks, "And, oh, George must have known he could come and get her, Shelley must have tattletaled, and when she had come as far as Fairchilds, as far even as the store" (233). Robbie feels that her running away to a place that is convenient for him will make him come and get her. Once she realizes this is not going to happen, she sets off on her journey home to George. In the Fairchild store, Robbie is in between leaving and returning home. As noted in chapter one, Robbie's home is not Memphis but George, and she returns to him by walking through the town of Fairchilds to the Fairchild plantation house Shellmound.

As she walks, Robbie thinks of her life with George and of the fight that led to her leaving. She remembers playfully swimming in the Yazoo River whirlpool (233), but then her mind goes deeper into thought. She sees the large Fairchild field where "the old Fairchilds had

started" (233), and as she looks across the field, "She knew she was a small figure here" (233). Her revelation is both literal, her body coming through the field, and figurative, "a small figure" among the Fairchilds and "here" in Fairchilds where she grew up in a family of a lower class than her husband's family. Compared to the pleading of many women of the Fairchild clan imploring George's attention, affection, and aid, Robbie's voice is a small whisper. On this journey home, Robbie also thinks of her marriage and admits she is madly in love with George. She expected him to change when they married, that he would no longer listen first to the chorus of voices of Fairchilds needing and pulling him and would instead listen to her voice – acknowledge the small figure, small voice against the rest. Robbie is angry at George for the trestle incident, but she is also angry at herself. "When she jumped up for him to look back at and heed, not knowing how love, anything, might have transformed her, it was in terror that she had held the Fairchilds' own mask in front of her. She cried out for him to come back from his danger as a favor to her" (235). Robbie is angry at herself for wearing the Fairchild mask and for pleading with George and asking him for a favor – something that she holds against the Fairchild women. She wanted him to save himself for her – the same way the Fairchilds wanted him to save Maureen for Denis. "The moment she had thought over with the most ruin to her pride was the one after the train had actually stopped" (236). Robbie is most embarrassed by the fact that what she asked of George was not necessary. The train stopped, he and Maureen were saved, and her plea had needlessly begged of him while betraying herself. She then thinks of how much she loves George, how intimately she knows him, and how much she needs him. It is from these thoughts that the Fairchilds' plantation bell pulls her, and her thoughts turn to George's family. Before Dabney Fairchild's fiancé Troy, knowing Robbie is walking from Fairchilds, comes to the cotton shed to check on Robbie, she thinks of the Fairchilds' love for George and how it

differs from her own. “She drew her breath in fiercely as always when the fond, teasing, wistful play of the family love for George hung and threatened near” (238). Robbie hates the way the family loves and worships George. She thinks that they are unworthy of him, for, “Nothing was worthy of him but the pure gold, a love that could be simply beside him – her love” (238). She does not need to ask him for favors or worship him; she loves him in a way that that is enough to just be with him, beside him, for the rest of their lives. On the trestle, Robbie put on the mask of the Fairchild women, but she realizes on her way home to George that she need not wear that mask. Her love for him is not only enough, it is better. This realization empowers Robbie to come home to George, to face the Fairchilds, and to fight them. Her anger at herself turns to anger at the Fairchilds for possessing the Fairchild mask in the first place; if it did not exist, she would have never worn it – not even for just one vulnerable moment. Robbie’s journey home prepares her to fight for her home with George and her place in his life.

The journey of leaving the home begins on the outside porches. The Fairchild identity that is strongest in the heart of the house – the parlor, dining room, halls, and even library – and then disintegrates as the characters move away from these rooms, seems to die almost completely outside the house. The porches, while still a part of the house, appear unable to contain the Fairchild singularity and ideal. Once the door of Shellmound is opened, the Fairchilds disperse into separate identities, think for themselves, and act according to individual will rather than by collective will of the family contained within the home. The night of Dabney’s wedding, the oldest daughter Shelley stands on the back porch looking forward to her life away from Shellmound when for her graduation present she takes a trip to Europe with Aunt Tempe. She thinks about the way in which the Fairchild pride was hurt by Dabney’s marriage to Troy, and ponders. Welty writes, “It shut a door in their faces. Behind the door, what? Shelley’s

desire fled, or danced seriously, to an open place – not from one room to another room with its door, but to an opening wood, with weather – with change, beauty" (309). While Dabney's marriage to Troy challenges the Fairchild pride, Shelley knows that leaving Shellmound will be her challenge to the Fairchild identity. Shelley no longer desires to be a part of the collective identity of the family that is enclosed in the innermost part of the house; she now desires change. She asks herself, "Why do you look out thinking nothing will happen any more? Why are you thinking your line of trees the indelible thing in the world? There's the long journey you're going on, with Aunt Tempe, leading out … and you can't see it now. Even closing your eyes, you see only the line of trees at Shellmound. Is it the world?" (309) Shelley realizes that since Dabney's engagement, she has only been seeing the world from within Shellmound, and she now desires to see beyond that. She has a firm grasp on her Fairchild identity, but she seems to desire an understanding of the world outside of Shellmound, and she seeks the adventure and the thrill of travel. She looks forward to leaving home for her trip to Europe and sees it as a chance to move beyond the identity of the whole and embrace an individual identity, whatever it may be. Shelley wants to grow and understand the world through her travels as did Welty.

The various homes of the Fairchilds, specifically, and the region of the Delta, in general, are not home for Laura. Her home is in Jackson – where she lived with her mother and father until nine months prior to the time of the novel, when her mother died, and where she still lives with her father (her visit to the Delta is only a week long and was never intended to be permanent). Laura misses that home and misses her parents. The reader sees this when Laura stands beside her mother's grave and, while thinking of her mother, feels the first tinge of homesickness. It is then that she remembers the letter from her father – that someone had opened before her and that she has now lost. The unwelcomed intrusion of the Fairchilds into her home

space appears while she and Shelley are standing in the cemetery. The narrator points out, "It always seemed to Laura that when she wanted to think of her mother, they would prevent her, and when she was not thinking of her, then they would say her name" (222). Laura seems perturbed by this dictation of when she can and cannot think of her mother, and it seems that Laura is frustrated with the Fairchilds inserting themselves into her relationship with her mother – into her home. Laura's frustration with the Fairchilds also seems to be over their assumed ownership of her mother. The narrator says, "And it was as if they had considered her mother all the time as belonging, in her life and in her death (for they took Laura and *let* her see the grave), as belonging here; they considered Shellmound the important part of life and death too" (223). The Fairchilds assume that Shellmound and Fairchilds are home – to Annie Laurie and to Laura. The fact that perhaps Laura never thought of Shellmound as home would never cross the minds of this Delta family.

This feeling of annoyance with the Fairchilds appears again with the opened letter from Jackson. The letter was written by her father and meant for her; it stands as a symbol of their love and connectedness; yet, someone had opened the letter before it ever got to Laura. As she stands in the cemetery,

> She nearly cried now, for she could not remember all it said. She suffered from the homesickness of having almost forgotten home. She scarcely ever thought, there was not time, of the house in Jackson, of her father, who had every single morning now gone to the office and come home, through the New Capitol which was the coolest way, walked down the hill so that only his legs could be seen under the branches of the trees, reading the Jackson Daily News so that only his

> straw hat could be seen above it, seen from a spot on their front walk where nobody watched for him now. (222)

Laura is homesick. She thinks of her father, lonely in the house in Jackson, and she pictures him walking home. Her thought of the "spot on their front walk where nobody watched for him now" is painful to read. Laura is clearly missing her father and is sad for his loneliness. What she does not reveal is who typically in the past stood on that spot on the front walk; it makes sense that it would have been Laura who waited there daily at the end of the work day for her father to come home from work. However, that spot could also be where Annie Laurie waited for him to come home from work – while Laura, nearby, watched her as she waited on her husband. Laura is standing at her mother's grave when she thinks of this. She then wonders, "Why couldn't she think of the death of her mother?" (223). Perhaps it is because home for her is the house in Jackson with her father and her mother. It is a home that she lost when Annie Laurie died, but it will always be the childhood home for Laura – the place that holds the emotional importance of the first home that the Fairchilds feel toward The Grove and Shellmound. It is the home that shares an identity with her family – her complete family. For Laura in her memories of "home," similar to Aunt Shannon, "all that is remembered joins, and lives – the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead" (*Stories* 948). Laura longs for her home in Jackson, complete with her mother and her father, and without the intrusion of the Fairchild aunts, uncles, and cousins.

While Laura is unable to think of the death of her mother, she's also unable to think of her father living in the house in Jackson without her and her mother. "She tried to see her father coming home from the office, first his body hidden by leaves, then his face hidden behind his paper. If she could not think of that, she was doomed; and she was doomed, for the memory was

only a flicker, gone now" (223). Laura feels hopeless because she no longer remembers home. Tuan writes of the possibility of Laura's feelings,

> How does a young child understand place? If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture, of support, then the mother is the child's primary place. … Places stay put. Their image is one of stability and permanence. The mother is mobile, but to the child she nonetheless stands for stability and permanence. She is nearly always around when needed. A strange world holds little fear for the young child provided his mother is nearby, for she is his familiar environment and haven. A child is adrift – placeless – without the supportive parent. (29)

Laura – who in this moment stands beside her mother's grave and whose father is outside her recollection – feels doomed as she feels adrift and homeless – as doomed as the homeless girl in the Fairchild woods.

This feeling of homelessness fades as Laura spends more days at Shellmound and in the Delta. The more time away from her home and in the home of the Fairchilds, the more she comes to realize that her shared identity is not with the Fairchilds and Shellmound but is in Jackson with her father and where the memory of her mother, for her, is most vivid. This realization comes to Laura most clearly the day after the wedding when she is riding in the car with Shelley and Maureen after going to Greenwood for groceries. Welty writes:

> Laura lay back in the whizzing car her head gently rolling against the soft seat and Shelley's arm, and brought Marmion, her stocking doll, up to her cheek. She held him there, though he was hot – hotter than she was – and smelled his face which became, quite gently, fragrant of a certain day to her; his breath was the wind and rain of her street in Jackson.

> It was a day they – her mother, father, and herself – were home from the summer's trip. (319)

Laura and her parents had been on a trip to the Delta, but they had returned "home" to their house in Jackson, and she begged her mother to make her a doll. Her mother obliged, and made her the doll Marmion – that Annie Laurie named after her house in the Delta. While riding with Shelley and Maureen through the Delta, the smell of the doll takes Laura back to the house in Jackson and the late afternoon on which her mother made the doll for her. Busch believes, "The more we personalize our possessions, the more we are able to see ourselves in them. And once we have invested ourselves in the things we own, it's difficult to be rid of them" (79). Laura has personalized her doll Marmion, and in it she sees herself and she senses her home. She longs for the closeness she had with her mother. The doll Marmion is, for Laura, a representation of her mother's love – the love is in the making and the giving of the doll to Laura the same way that the hiding and the giving of the pipe to George was Laura's love.

Just as Laura mentally wandered Shellmound vertically, she does the same for her Jackson home. In a scene similar to Welty's account of returning from trips to visit her own extended family, in *Delta Wedding* Welty writes,

> With the opening of the front door which swung back with an uncustomary shiver, a sudden excitement made Laura run in first, pushing ahead of her father who had turned the key. She ran pounding up the stairs, striking the carpet flowers with the flat of her hands. The house was so close, so airless, that it gave out its own breath as she stirred it to life, the scents of the carpet and matting and the oily smell of the clock and the smell of starch in the curtains. (319-20)

While Laura's walk through Shellmound was mental, her walk through her home in Jackson is physical. Instead of dropping her suitcase and hesitating before entering the house (as she did at Shellmound), Laura runs through the door even before her father could get it fully opened. The way in which Laura dashes into the house and runs up the stairs conveys her excitement for being home. Then the smells of home come to her. Tuan says, "Odors lend character to objects and places, making them distinctive, easier to identify and remember. Odors are important to human beings" (11). First, the odor of her doll Marmion carried her back to her home, and it reminds her of the odors of the home and helps her to identify home and remember home – something she is unable to do earlier in the novel. She smells the oil of the clock – that she associates with her father as he stands in front of it in the next paragraph, and she smells the starch from the curtains – which more than likely was an association with her mother, as starching curtains would have been a task Annie Laurie would have done. For Laura, the home in Jackson and her parents share the same identity, and they share it with her as well. It is merely another representation of her parents – her true home. Marcus touches on the link between home and parents when she writes, "Though rarely recognized or discussed, our attitudes toward home, … are frequently closely linked to those of our parents" (82). For Laura her idea of home is completely entwined with her idea of her parents and the family unit the three of them shared before her mother's death.

Laura knows that the home she longs for no longer exists, but as she looks over the cotton fields, "Now she held Marmion close … She could kiss his fragrant face and know, Never more would she have this, the instant answer to a wish, for her mother was dead" (322). However, before Laura can fully process the realization of her lost home, the car comes upon Virgie Lee Fairchild who wants nothing to do with the Fairchilds or her daughter Maureen. After Maureen

leans over and laughs in her mother's face, the narrator points out, "The sight and sound of that so terrified Laura that she flung herself over the back of the seat and threw her arms around Maureen as if to pull her back from fire, and held her, calling her as if she were deaf, 'Maureen, Maureen!'" (324). Laura is horrified that Maureen is unable to find the comfort of home in Virgie Lee the way Laura does in her parents. Annie Laurie, even dead, provides solace and refuge for Laura; yet, she sees Maureen's mother as a dangerous "fire," and she pulls her cousin back and holds her. It is at this moment that Laura knows that living in the altered version of home that remains in Jackson is better than being a visitor – even if long term – in someone else's home. It is better than remaining in the Delta where her memories of her mother seem to be overpowered by the family's memories of her mother – which were primarily memories of her mother before Laura was born (223). In a way, her mother still lives in the identity that she and Billy McRaven built in Jackson and that they share with Laura. Her mother will not physically be there when Laura returns to Jackson, but her mother's memory will be easier to capture to keep when she is away from Shellmound and the Fairchilds. Laura comes to the final decision after this car ride; Welty writes, "Laura felt that in the end she would go – go from all this, go back to her father" (326). Laura's journey away from home has brought her to a realization of where her home lies and how she identifies with that home.

While leaving and going back home play an important role in *Delta Wedding*, that role is significantly more important in *The Optimist's Daughter*. The entire novel is about a woman who leaves home, goes back home, and while there, searches for a way to leave one last time without losing her own sense of home and place. Welty explains her choice for having Laurel live in Chicago, "A lot depended on her point of view. I made her an artist who lived in Chicago, which would be as far as I could think of from living in Mississippi, so that she could have a

refreshing point of view, a learning point of view" (*More Conversations* 239). By removing Laurel from her life in Mississippi by decades, Welty presents a character that has more room to grow and change and to learn. Throughout her time in Mississippi, Laurel learns exactly what home means and how important that is to her.

When Laurel leaves her home in Chicago to travel down South to see her father, she flies to New Orleans; she is not intending to go home to Mount Salus at all. Her trip home is not planned, and Laurel has very little time to comprehend the fact that she is going to the home on Main Street in Mount Salus and that neither of her parents are going to be there when she arrives. Laurel has less than twenty-four hours to prepare to go to New Orleans, a neutral site that is out of town for both Laurel and her father. Both father and daughter leave home to travel to see a doctor who has also left the place all three of them know. The narrator explains that Judge McKelva and Dr. Nate Courtland "were of two generations but the same place" (884). After Dr. Courtland examines Judge McKelva's eye, he pulls Fay and Laurel aside to talk with them. The narrator explains, "Laurel looked for a moment into the experienced face, so entirely guileless. The Mississippi country that lay behind him was all in it" (887). Were the point of view Dr. Courtland's, he probably would have seen in Laurel's face that same Mississippi country that lay behind her. Both Laurel and Nate Courtland chose to leave Mount Salus to study (Nate Courtland studied under Dr. Kunomoto in Houston, Texas) and did not return to live. After Judge McKelva dies, Dr. Courtland tells Laurel, "[T]here's nobody from *home* with you" (907). Fay, an outsider in Mount Salus, does not count as someone from home, and Dr. Courtland, the only person from home in New Orleans, has plans. While both Laurel and Nate know that the people from home will meet Laurel at the train station or be waiting for her in the home on Main Street in Mount Salus, Nate is bothered that Laurel has to spend her first night as an orphan. When

Laurel refuses Dr. Courtland's obligatory invitation for her to stay in his home, he sends her back to the Hibiscus Hotel in his car. Laurel only has from that moment until the next day when the train arrives in Mount Salus to prepare for being home for the first time in a year and a half and encountering a home without both her mother and her father.

This return to Mount Salus for the final time never entered younger Laurel's mind when she first moved out of the house in Mount Salus to go to the Art Institute in Chicago. Much as in Welty's own life, Laurel's mother encouraged her more in her pursuit of the arts, and her father seemed less convinced this was a good path for her. In "An Only Child," an earlier draft of the novel, Welty wrote:

> It was foregone that every other generation of the McKelvas sent out a missionary. It had been up to Judge McKelva not to be a missionary – for by the same pattern, every *other* generation produced a lawyer – but to produce a missionary, and he had only produced Laurel.
>
> "Although, Polly, sometimes you can act pretty self-righteous," he'd teased her. "You may be one and don't know it."
>
> "I am the first McKelva artist," she had told him, seriously pleased to think of it in this way.
>
> "*See there*?" he cried. "Well, let's hope for the best, Becky."
>
> "An artist is a very good thing," her mother had remarked. Laurel's enrollment at the Art Institute had come by her mother's championship. ("An Only Child" 25)

With Becky's support, Laurel set off from Mount Salus to begin a new life in Chicago as an artist. When Laurel left home, she had no clue whether or not she would return to live in Mount

Salus after she finished art school. Though she had returned home to Mount Salus for visits, after she left to go to art school, she does not return to live in the home in Mount Salus again. Elizabeth Kerr writes, "The device of having as recurrent characters Laurel McKelva Hand's six lifelong friends and former bridesmaids effectively suggests the social background which Laurel rejected when she left Mount Salus" (134). The contrast between the lives of the bridesmaids and Laurel's life highlights the ways in which Laurel's desire to leave Mount Salus has changed her.

Laurel does return to Mount Salus to have her wedding ceremony in the Presbyterian Church. In the final version of the novel, Laurel remembers traveling with Phil to Mount Salus to be married, but she does not reminisce on arriving or being in the home when she returned to be married. When writing the story, "Baltimore," Welty included a short speech that Laurel made to the funeral guests. Laurel says, "I came home to this house to be married – was married by Grandfather McKelva in the church I can see from this spot" ("Baltimore" 39). Laurel came home to a large Mount Salus wedding in the church built with her father's money, where her grandfather could marry her, and where her parents could celebrate with them, and her closest Mount Salus friends could serve as bridesmaids.

After her wedding in Mount Salus, Laurel went back to Chicago and to a new life with her new husband. The reader of *The Optimist's Daughter* knows very little about Laurel's life in Chicago. She designs fabrics and has a job designing the curtains for a repertory theatre (891). In the earliest drafts of *The Optimist's Daughter*, Welty included even less about Laurel's life in Chicago and with Phil. As she worked on the story, she added in a great amount of detail concerning the lives of Laurel and Phil. In revisions, she added and then cut many times. Welty explained this to Mary Lou Aswell: "I cut 144 lines out of the version you read. Mostly the part about the husband that seemed now too thin, keeping just the most pertinent parts. Trouble was,

I'd written that part both fuller and down to very little at all, and I think I'd hurt the story by some attempting to have it both ways" (November 6, 1971). Welty also explained her decision to cut these parts about Laurel and Phil's life together in Chicago in an interview with Sally Wolff. Welty explains: "I wanted the relationship of Phil and Laurel to be taken for granted for my purposes in the novel. It gave it a more proper depth and allowed me to concentrate on the scene in which Phil says, 'I wanted it! I wanted it!' … You have to get the proportions right. You have to keep in mind the good of the whole story" (*More Conversations* 164). In a later interview, she explained these cuts again. She said, "World War II was still fresh in my mind. So many details come to mind that fit. My use of him changed. He remained the same. That was his function in the novel. I wanted to convey his reality. … But I felt I had too much about Chicago, so I kept things out that were not contributing to what I was trying to do" (*More Conversations* 265). In the parts where Welty develops the Phil story more, she also develops the character of Laurel and the Chicago part of her life more fully. We see Phil as Laurel sees him. We experience him as Laurel experienced him. In writing a fuller version of Laurel's life with Phil, Welty developed their relationship more fully. She then cut a large part of it while maintaining the essence of Phil that pervades the novel and Laurel's life.

In the final version of the novel, Laurel spends her last night in Mount Salus holed up in the sewing room dreaming of Phil. When she wakes, she realizes the dream was of something that had really happened. She and Phil had ridden on the train from Chicago to Mount Salus, they crossed the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The narrator points out, "And they themselves were part of the confluence. Their own joint act of faith had brought them here at the very moment and matched its occurrence, and proceeded as it proceeded" (797). Laurel and Phil brought their individual lives, their individual identities, and their individual concepts of

home, and they merged them – just as the waters below them, yet they did not cease to hold on to who they had always been individually. Laurel held on to her concept of home and the identity of home she felt and experienced in Mount Salus. When asked, in reference to Laurel, if there comes a time in a person's life when she no longer wants to be attached to the place from where she gained her identity, Welty replied:

> No, because what meant the most to her, I think, was her identity down there [in Mount Salus]. That didn't mean that she couldn't fall in love and marry and live somewhere else, but that wasn't breaking with her family. I don't think that one means denying the other. I think there are people such as you describe, but it was not true of Laurel….She herself is quite secure in her identity, and she did have a definite, strong sense of identity with family and place. (*Conversations* 237-8)

When she marries Phil and leaves to create a new life with him in Chicago, she does not let go of the home she made or the identity she shared with her family in Mount Salus.

In the year and a half that Laurel was married to Phil, she did create a home and an identity with Phil, but nothing negated the home she had built with her parents in Mount Salus. Laurel, home in Mount Salus and sitting at her father's desk, looks at her wedding photo with Phil and thinks, "Her marriage had been of magical ease … and all belonging to Chicago and not here" (957). While few details about Laurel's and Phil's life together in Chicago appear in the final version of the novel, the drafts of the novel provide more information including details about their first meeting and their life in Chicago after they were married. When they met, Laurel and Phil were both going to the museum at the Art Institute in Chicago. Welty writes:

> They were stopped at the same moment with a foot on the same step. Then up they sped. For the rest of the afternoon, they walked miles without ever leaving

> the museum and never stopped talking. They were as aware of an attraction as if it had been some amazing resemblance growing between them, which called clamorous attention to itself and reverberated to their footsteps. (Galleys 146)

Just as Laurel and Phil had sped up the stairs the first time they met, they excitedly embraced a life together as husband and wife. The sentiment of their first meeting mirrors the feeling they shared as they rode the train from Chicago to Mount Salus to be married; the confluence began at this moment and became stronger and deeper when they were married. Once they returned to Chicago from being married in Mount Salus, Phil and Laurel moved into an apartment and began building a life together. Welty writes:

> He was amused that she had come to marriage unprepared for life with anybody who knew how to make things work. He re-routed the wiring in their apartment to give them their bed light. He made a four-legged stool for her to stand on to put up her curtains and hang her wash. … 'You saved my life,' she'd said when Philip replaced the broken sash cord so that the little kitchen window could be raised. 'Well, that time it was easy,' he said, and, both laughing, they sat down to the table with the blessing of a fresh breeze from the Lake. Even to the sound of a distant band concert – and he'd whistled along with it, as though to say a proper husband could produce music just by loving it, skim it right off the Lake. (Galleys 146-7)

Though Laurel joked when she told Phil he saved her life, he certainly had a strong influence in it. In the final version of the novel, Laurel asks Fay, "Do you know what a labor of love is?" (989) then tells her, "Phil had the gift – the gift of his hands" (989).While the reader most certainly sees this gift in the breadboard Phil had made for Laurel's mother, these other gifts of

Phil's labors of love that illustrate Laurel and Phil's home in Chicago are cut from the final text, Welty focusing all of Phil's handiwork on the breadboard and concentrating on Laurel herself. In the novel, Laurel realizes, "She had a certain gift of her own. He taught her, through his example, how to use it. She learned how to work by working beside him. He taught her how to draw, to work by working beside him. He taught her to draw, to work toward and into her pattern, not to sketch peripheries" (980). Together, Laurel and Phil created a joint identity as designers – as Hands – Phil's family name – together in a labor of love. They built a home together, one that was not just a home on the periphery but a home that was central and important. The home Laurel and Phil built in Chicago during the year and a half they were married did not replace Laurel's home in Mount Salus, but it also was not devoid of attachment and identity nor was it a home on the periphery. Laurel's home with Phil – one which ended decades before the novel begins – remains equally as important to her as her home in Mount Salus. However, Laurel seems to not realize this until she dreams that Phil's voice goes around and around the Mount Salus house crying out to her the night before Laurel leaves to return to Chicago after her father's funeral (978).

As Laurel weeps with her head upon the desk, she thinks of Phil, dead even before her mother. "But Phil was lost. Nothing of their life together remained except in her own memory; love was sealed away into its perfection and had remained there" (977). She thinks of how their life would have turned out had he lived, and "[s]he wept for what happened to life" (978). Yet, the encounter Laurel has with Phil in the sewing room comes not from her memory but from her imagination:

> Now, by her own hands, the past had been raised up, and he looked at her, Phil himself – here waiting, all the time, Lazarus. He looked at her out of eyes wild

> with the craving of his unlived life, with mouth open like a funnel's. . . . "Laurel! Laurel! Laurel!" Phil's voice cried. . . . "I wanted it!" Phil cried. His voice rose with the wind in the night and went around the house and around the house. It became a roar. "I wanted it!" (978)

While the "it" Phil wanted could imply simply the life together of which they were robbed, the "it" could also mean that he wanted a home of their own – one that shared an identity with them as they grew in their lives together. Phil was, after all, an architect – a designer, builder of houses. Phil had said, "I get a moral satisfaction out of putting things together" (980). Sometime after the roar of Phil's voice, Laurel falls asleep and dreams of Phil – this time of a memory, not of something imagined. Riding on a train from Chicago to visit her parents in Mount Salus, Laurel thinks of the life she is beginning with Phil, "It's our turn!," meaning, to build a home. She expects that life together to last forever. One of the last changes Welty made, in the final galley proofs, was to the part where Laurel thinks, not dreams, "If Phil had lived." The second time Laurel thinks "If Phil had lived" her complete thought was "If Phil had lived, and I had lived on! If I had been afraid of nothing – nothing in the world. Afraid of nothing people might do and did do to each other in the name of loving each other" (Galleys 143). Welty marks through this on the galley and writes a note to her editor, "Albert: I think well of deleting this too. By now it must all be understood. Isn't it stronger and more of a shock to simply say again "if Phil had lived –" (Galleys 143). Deleting the sentence was the right call – it is more powerful written simply, but the deletion does put into words the feeling that, by this point in the novel, is understood. Much like the background story of Phil and Laurel's life together, Welty included additional explanation and then cut to make mood and emotion fit her purposes. Laurel

had excitedly prepared to build a new home with Phil and now considers how her own identity would have changed had Phil lived.

Laurel mentally acknowledges later that she had sought love and to give love within a shell of protection. She thinks, "Until she knew Phil, she thought of love as a shelter; her arms went out as a naïve offer of safety. … He had showed her that this need not be so. Protection, like self-protection, fell away from her like all one garment, some anachronism foolishly saved from childhood" (980). Phil had shown Laurel that the protection, comfort, and love she felt in the home made by her family can be felt outside that home as well. The shell-house of safety she believed existed when she arrived in Mount Salus, in fact, did not exist. In their short marriage, Phil had taught Laurel this, but in the decades since Phil's death, Laurel had forgotten. Dreaming of Phil brought back to her the truths he taught her about love and home, and the need for the physical house on Main Street in Mount Salus left her, and she was able to leave the innermost part of the house and walk into the lighted hallway outside the master bedroom (981). Laurel (after ridding the house of the bird) proceeds to the sidewalk outside where she burns all the papers from the night before. "There was nothing she was leaving in the whole shining and quiet house now to show for her mother's life and her mother's happiness and suffering, and nothing to show for Fay's harm; her father turning between them, holding onto them both, then letting them go, was without any sign" (986). Laurel cleans the house and burns her mother's papers to keep Fay from being able to harm her memory of her parents any more than she already had. With that, Laurel is ready to leave behind the McKelva house (presumably for the last time) and return to Chicago.

Laurel had forgotten to rid one remaining room of her mother's memory, however, and as she walks into the kitchen she is once again flooded by memories. In the kitchen, Laurel finds

the one thing she intends to leave home with, the one thing she seeks to hold onto – her mother's breadboard that Phil had made, a physical, tactile totem of her mother and father's home and her and Phil's love. Bachelard writes, "There is a sign of violence . . . in which an over-excited creature emerges from a lifeless shell" (111). He explains that there exists a conflict between fear and curiosity – a being hides in the shell for fear but emerges in curiosity. This emerging is an aggressive act that hints at violence. Laurel emerging from the safety of her shell, her home in Mount Salus, too, will not come without violence. Fay comes back to Mount Salus from Texas early, and Laurel must face her. The conflict between Laurel and Fay that has built throughout the novel must be settled in order for Laurel to leave the Mount Salus house behind. In the novel after Laurel weeps herself to sleep on her mother's desk and amongst her mother's papers in the sewing room, she wakes to remember dreaming a real-life journey with Phil. However, in "An Only Child" (before Phil was developed in detail), Laurel wakes to find Fay home from Texas and lying in her bed – the same bed in which Laurel was born and her mother had died. Laurel wonders: "Suppose Fay had been gentle and loving and compassionate toward Father; would I have been any happier that she took Mother's place" ("An Only Child" nd 91). Laurel then grabs her mother's papers – to deny Fay access to them – and she goes outside and burns them. Having Fay home and asleep in the bed, in some ways, weakens the scene Laurel has with Fay in the kitchen. In the final version, Fay's unexpected arrival catches Laurel slightly off guard and provides more drama – a "scene" that is fitting for Fay. Welty writes:

> And all Laurel had felt and known in the night, all she'd remembered, and as much as she could understand this morning – in the week at home, the month, in her life – could not tell her now how to stand and face the person whose own life

had not taught her how to feel. Laurel didn't know even how to tell her goodbye. (988).

The fight between Laurel and Fay in the kitchen is inevitable. Laurel's escape from the protective shell of her home follows many years of her repressed grief and guilt, and the portion of her life that included Fay had been spent in repressed distaste and appall. Laurel's full escape from the shell had to include a confrontation with Fay. Laurel thinks, "For there is hate as well as love . . . in the coming together and the continuity of our lives" (990). Laurel is no longer conflicted about leaving the house. That Fay, who knows nothing of the home's importance and can, therefore, not appreciate it, now owns it, inhabits it, angers Laurel.

The breadboard scene is present in the earliest drafts of the novel, but there is one change that seems small, but is important. In the earlier versions of this scene, Laurel stands with the breadboard held out – as if hiding behind it. Welty writes beautifully, "For as long as she could hold the board where she had raised it, Laurel was on the other side. She was safe on the side of the ones she honored, remembered; back on the side of the angels to whom she belonged" ("An Only Child" n.d. 94). At this point in the story, Laurel has scrubbed the house clean and burned away anything to show for her parents and their love. A later draft says, "The pride she had felt in the cleaning, the polishing, the eviction and the burning of evidence, in all she had driven herself to do in time, changed suddenly into shame" ("Poor Eyes" 91). In ridding the McKelva house of anything she feared Fay could get to or ruin, she had also rid the house of her parents – "the angels to whom she belonged." They are not present to stand on her side of the breadboard. In the final novel, Laurel holds the board over her head. She does not hold it there to hit Fay any more than holding it as a barrier was to be a shield against Fay's attack. She holds the board above her head because there, the board is out of Fay's reach. Every other memory that Fay

could taint has been removed by the cleaning and the burning; this one thing remains. And unlike the other things that Laurel cleaned or burned, this sentimental object for her memory was tied to Phil. It brought together her mother and her husband. Fay has desecrated the home and, in some ways, the memory of her parents; she doesn't want Fay touching *Phil's* memory. This one thing is the only thing Fay can get to and ruin, so she holds it over her head to keep it out of Fay's reach. Fay, whose mere presence has ruined Laurel's childhood home, is not allowed to ruin the home Laurel chose – the one she made with Phil.

In Welty's papers from *One Writer's Beginnings*, she writes, "Home, the place I love best, and another destination, whatever place I may have come to know better through work, speculation, desire, could not exist one without the other. … In the imagination too there is always Home base and the beckoning world" (30). Laurel's home was no longer Mount Salus; it was Chicago. In one draft of the novel, Fay says to her sister, "This is Becky's daughter, and I don't know why she didn't stay home. Her home is in Chicago, Illinois" ("Poor Eyes" 44). While Fay's statement is said to belittle Laurel, Fay speaks the truth here. Laurel's home is in Chicago, Illinois. For Laurel, what had made the house in Mount Salus a home was her parents. The shared identity was one of their individual family, its history, and love. The McKelvas' identity lies in their ability to protect and love each other – love was shelter, and likewise, shelter – the home – was love. From the point at which Laurel arrived at the McKelva house, she had been struggling between the home base and the beckoning world (Chicago), but as she dreams of Phil, she realizes that she has made Chicago her home. "Until she knew Phil, she thought of love as shelter; her arms went out as a naïve offer of safety. He showed her that this need not be so. Protection, like self-protection, fell away from her like all one garment, some anachronism foolishly saved from childhood" (980). Laurel chose a home with Phil knowing her love for him

could not protect him, much like she was unable to protect her parents. Unlike her memory of her parents, however, her memory of Phil remains intact and protected. The home Laurel made with Phil (whom Fay dismisses as irrelevant with "But he was somebody from Chicago,") ("Poor Eyes" 46) is one that had not been desecrated by time, by Fay, or by anyone else. During her confrontation with Fay, Laurel realizes the truth about what was and is really her home. Laurel thinks:

> It is memory that is the somnambulist. It will come back in its wounds from across the world, like Phil, calling us by our names and demanding its rightful tears. It will never be impervious. The memory can be hurt, time and again – but in that may lie its final mercy. As long as it's vulnerable to the living moment, it lives for us, and while it lives, and while we are able, we can give it up its due. (992).

Laurel realizes her home lies not in the physical presence of the McKelva house but in love and memory – which unlike the brick and mortar of the McKelva house are living things. Marrs writes that Laurel "is not abandoning the past – it exists for her in memory. She simply does not need the family home, the books and furniture, the town itself in order to recall those she has loved" (*One Writer's Imagination* 232). That home, safe and untainted in Laurel's memory, allows her to put down the breadboard, walk out of her childhood home, and return back to her chosen home base of Chicago.

In the papers from composing *One Writer's Beginnings* where Welty writes about home and the beckoning world, she also writes, "For me, [home and the beckoning world] hang by a thread from the other, the thread being on the journey between. What is its life but the tensions between them pulled tight? I cover a like distance every time I write. I think one reason I love to

write is that writing is a journey. In the writing itself, which it uses and risks everything I have, lies my personal happiness" (30). It is on the journey away from or to home that a person discovers the meaning of life and happiness. Though Welty writes about writing here, she also speaks to life in general. The journey requires risks, and the characters in *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* find their own happiness in the risk of the journey just as Welty did. As quoted earlier, George Garrett writes, "We could love [home] or we could hate it or both at once; but we could not easily leave it" (Garrett 30). Through the difficult journeys away from and back to home, the characters came to a realization of what "home" means.

CONCLUSION

What place, then, does home have in fiction? It serves as more than location and even more than place. It gives greater insight into the identity of the home's inhabitants and the community that surrounds the home. With both *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*, allowing outsiders access to the home challenges the home's identity and the home's role in the social structure of Fairchilds and Mount Salus. Ultimately, leaving and later returning home provides the characters with a broader perspective which enables them to better understand themselves and their homes.

John Crowe Ransom wrote about *Delta Wedding*, "I feel sure that the pattern of Southern life as Miss Welty has it is doomed" (74). In an interview with Welty, Charles T. Bunting asked Welty whether she felt Louis D. Rubin's assessment that "The closed little world of Shellmound is doomed" is a fair assessment. Welty replied, "Oh, yes. I think that was implicit in the novel: that this was all such a fragile, temporary thing" (*Conversations* 50). For a way of life and family that seems doomed, *Delta Wedding* presents, on the surface at least, a family amidst a joyous occasion – a wedding. How exactly the life of the Fairchilds in Shellmound is doomed is not explained in detail by Ransom or Welty. Through looking closely at the home, however the reader can understand just how the Fairchilds are doomed. The Fairchild identity that is instilled in family members in the home and shown to the community around the family is not as strong as the adult Fairchilds would like to acknowledge. By looking at the outsiders who have been granted access to the Fairchilds and their homes and those Fairchild family members who leave or return home, the reader sees that the Fairchild identity is just as fragile as the porcelain nightlight, and just like the porcelain nightlight, the Fairchild identity will certainly shatter.

Robbie Reid Fairchild's willingness to challenge the Fairchild identity empowers Ellen Fairchild to also question it. Though Robbie's husband, George, is a member of Battle's generation, Robbie is the same age as Shelley. Much like the other Fairchild family members her generation and below, Robbie refuses to blindly accept the Fairchild identity and concede to the Fairchild ways. While Shelley attended college in Virginia, her knowledge of the world outside of Fairchilds seems limited. She looks forward to leaving Shellmound and Fairchilds and exploring Europe and gaining her own identity – one that is separate from the collective identity of her parents and her father's siblings. Mary Denis Buchanan, Tempe's daughter, has chosen to live her life away from the Delta and happily lives her life in Illinois with her red-headed Yankee husband and half-Yankee children. Laura McRaven has chosen to deny the Fairchild identity and looks forward to leaving the Fairchilds and Shellmound to return to her father in Jackson. Even Dabney Fairchild Flavin who has chosen to remain in the Delta presents a challenge to the Fairchild identity in marrying Troy Flavin. Though she is willing to stay in the land of her family, she is unwilling to acquiesce to the way in which her father and his siblings want her to live her life. The Fairchild way of life is not just destined to be doomed, it is deteriorating throughout the novel. Without looking closely at the home and the character's feelings of home, the reader may miss this. Outsiders have been allowed to penetrate the united front the Fairchilds present, and in so doing, the wall begins to crumble.

Laurel, who had spent years believing the house on Mount Salus street was her home, learns throughout the novel that it was not. She believed that the Mount Salus home carried the same feelings for her as the house in West Virginia had for her mother Becky. Her parents, not the physical building, provided her a home in their love and protection. Later in her life, Phil provided a home of love that had also provided love though never promised protection. Phil's

lesson to her was that a home does not have to be made of safety and protection, that it can be made of other things. Laurel and Phil created a home together just as they created other things – drawings and tapestries, breadboards and houses. Laurel could not have realized her true home anywhere other than where she did – in her childhood home in Mount Salus and in the room where her life with her family began, in the room that served as her nursery as a baby. After her father's death and burial and after Laurel searches the house for signs of her father's life and her mother's life, and even after sorting through her mother's letters and pictures, Laurel sleeps. But, she dreams not of her parents or the life she shared with them; she dreams of Phil and the life they both had wanted to spend together. She awakes to remember the home they created and the ways in which that home has come to be a home to her just as much as the home of protection and love she had possessed with her parents.

After reading the novel multiple times, I still failed to understand how Laurel could burn her mother's papers, leave her family heirlooms, and walk out the front door of her Mount Salus home to never return again. If home carries with it the significance and emotional attachment that the geographers and philosophers I have referenced throughout this study claim it does, Laurel's actions seem even more baffling. However, by looking closely at the homes in the novel and how Laurel comes to claim and understand them all, it becomes evident how Laurel is able to walk away from the Mount Salus house. Of the places that Laurel calls home, the house on Main Street ends up not being one. Her two homes – the one with her parents and the one with Phil – are not bound by a physical structure. Much like the snail, Laurel carries her home with her. Her home is not bound by time, space, or place – how can it be when the people with which Laurel has created the homes themselves are no longer bound by time, space, or place. Once Laurel realizes where her home lies, she is able to walk out of the Mount Salus house without

physical memorabilia of her parents' lives – all that she needs lives with her always secured in her memory. Likewise, once the reader comes to understand where Laurel's home lies, the reader is better able to understand Laurel's ability to leave the house on Main Street and the town of Mount Salus behind.

While much has been said about Welty and place, there is a lack of commentary about the specific place of the home. What I expected to find when I began this project is far different from what I discovered as I looked more closely at the homes and the ways in which they are presented in the novels. I never expected to find evidence of the Fairchilds' imminent doom by analyzing Shellmound, the place where the family seems so strong and united. Also, while I hoped that reading the home in *The Optimist's Daughter* would give me a better understanding of how Laurel is able to leave her childhood home without even appearing reluctant or sad, I did not expect the answer to be because her true home is now Chicago. I am unsure what analyzing the homes in Welty's other novels would reveal, but a place (the home) that carried so much significance to Welty undoubtedly carries significance in the other novels as well. Welty wrote about universal ideas that are applicable to a reader of any time period or any region or country; she wrote of love, loss, joy, pain, family, and friends – and often she wrote about these universal idea as they occur in the home – in and of itself a universal idea.

Although more than twenty-five years separated the writing of *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter*, they both were written at times of uncertainty both in Welty's life and in the lives of the country and region. Welty wrote *Delta Wedding* during World War II, and she wrote *The Optimist's Daughter* after the deaths of her mother and brothers, which left Welty as the only remaining member of her immediate family. Welty's life, the struggles she faced, and

the love she felt at the times she was writing these novels impacted the stories and the ways in which she wrote them.

While writing *Delta Wedding*, many of Welty's friends and family members were fighting in World War II, and she clearly worried about them all – especially her brothers and John Robinson, the man she anticipated marrying after the war. During this period, Welty split her time between Jackson and New York, but neither place felt like home. The more Jackson began buzzing with war preparations and training, the more unsettled Welty became. In the final paragraph of a letter to Diarmuid Russell dated September 20, 1941, she writes, "Then when it comes the quiet seems so quiet, which may be why I have those strange concentrations of feelings and dreams, I feel no identity with any of that other [the Jackson of war-preparation], and this identity or love for something else grows deeper still." The shared identity between Welty and her home of Jackson disintegrated as Jackson became more war-focused. The familiar town of her childhood had changed, and the people of her childhood were mostly gone.

In 1944, Welty spent four months in New York interning at the *New York Times Book Review*. Though she enjoyed her time with friends, she grew homesick. Before going to New York, she had written to Robinson of "our countryside" when describing the scenery as she drove her brother Walter to Meridian to go off to school. Once in New York, she wrote Robinson, "I wished so to be home – I felt I could find out how they were getting along if I were in a human place" (June 19, 1944), and in another letter written that same day, "I think of our people – Mississippi – surely they are the people of the world – they are the kind that matter in all countries – They think first of the men, I believe, almost know that and that is why I believe in them" (June 19, 1944). She was frustrated with the rich and snooty, detached people she encountered in New York to whom the troops seemed faceless and nameless. They were an idea

that allowed stores to close on D-Day – not without adding a "God Bless America" sign (June 19, 1944). To Eudora, the troops were not anonymous. They were John Robinson, Walter and Edward Welty, Hubert Creekmore, Frank Lyell, and others. The men were people she knew from families she knew. She sent newspaper clippings written about acquaintances who did heroic deeds and she wrote of the losses her community sustained. For Welty, it was one thing for intellectuals to sit in New York and pontificate about the war and the problems in the world, but these were a far cry from Mississippi – where those Welty knew were not merely talking about war but were overseas fighting it. She clearly missed Mississippi when in New York, and while she was not writing much on the Delta story while up North, she did gain a new appreciation for home – a new appreciation for the South, for Mississippi, for the simple life. If "our people" are "the kind that matter in all countries" how does *Delta Wedding* (or the people in it) speak to this? Welty – never one to crusade in her fiction – chose not to write a novel making commentary on the current political scene but to do what she always did by presenting the conflicts and truths of individual lives. When she comes home, she writes a novel about family life, a unit of individuals – a universally understood idea. There is an attachment to place – to the home for Welty, but that is not a Southern attachment. All regions and peoples have attachments to their homes, and families everywhere were torn apart (some temporarily and some permanently) by the raging war in Europe and Asia. In *Delta Wedding*, Welty presents a world that seems quintessentially Southern, but what she also shows it that the South can't be taken as a whole any more than the rest of the world can be. The South is comprised of individual families – families like any other region's families – and families are comprised of individuals – individual people who experience the same things: love, marriage, loss, conversation, change, departures, arrivals, and love for home.

Twenty-five years later, Welty was still writing on the individual family and individual people who experience those same things. Welty's own family experienced a great deal of change in the decade leading up to her writing *The Optimist's Daughter*. Welty's mother's health began declining in 1957, and her youngest brother, Walter died, in January of 1959, from complications with arthritis (Marrs 275). Welty spent the next seven years caring for her mother and the family home with the help of nurses and cleaning ladies. In March of 1963, Diarmuid wrote Welty about her efforts to care for her mother, "But it is clear you must be saved from too much work and too much worry and from your mother's uncertain temper. It is just too much for one person to bear." One month later, Welty put her mother in a convalescent home, and Russell wrote, "Glad your mother is finding the place acceptable. I'm sure she will find more life and interest there than at home – and perhaps this was part of her mental condition, not being able to see things, but having to have them brought to her" (April 1, 1963). In August, Eudora took her mother out of the convalescent home and brought her back to their 1119 Pinehurst Street home. For a little over two years more, Welty continued to care for her mother. In January of 1966, Chestina Welty died, and four days later, on January 24, Edward Welty died somewhat unexpectedly of a brain infection. By the next year, Eudora had written several drafts of *The Optimist's Daughter*. Charlotte Capers asked Welty if writing the novel helped her work through her own grief, and Welty responded, "I think it did; although, I did not undertake it for any therapeutic reasons" (*Conversations* 116). Welty had not written anything so close to her own life before, and she had reservations about publishing the story as a novel but agreed to revise it after Russell and William Maxwell, her friend and editor of the *New Yorker*, encouraged her to do so (Marrs 362). She explains the novel to Ken Millar in a letter dated January 14, 1972, "It is so close to me that I have held onto it for two years, uncertain about publishing it alone as a

book. It's about sad things – about a few of those things we can't ever change but must try through fiction to make something with – the question is, did I make it? And without doing hurt to lives I cared about? I worked & hoped –" The Pulitzer Prize that the novel won is proof that she did make something from "those things we can't ever change."

Beyond personal change while writing these novels, the country as a whole and the South as a region were also experiencing on-going struggles. In a July 13, 1944, letter to John Robinson, Welty writes about trouble brewing in the South,

> I worry, & wish there were less ignorance & more knowledge involved … Is it always the wrong people, who do not hesitate to "solve" things? Who do not understand anything … The trouble is … there is just enough truth in the actual situation, just enough badness, to mislead "intellectuals" … I think the reason I'm so tired at night's I'm given body blows & have gotten mad to no avail on behalf of Mississippi – every Southerner I know here is the same.

She then gives Robinson a recent example of one such body blow, "The other day going down on an elevator someone introduced a girl 'from PM' & me 'From Miss' & when I said How do you do, *she* said 'oh you're from *Mississippi* where they persecute the negro & have the highest percentage of illiteracy in the union—' … & that time I was speechless and only in a dumb fury at the unfairness & rudeness & smugness of these people." Welty's frustration lies with the ignorance of both Southerners and New Yorkers and the inability of both to see human beings as individuals with individual feelings and lives – this is also her frustration with the situation in Germany at the time.

The political climate in Mississippi was even worse in the 1960s when Welty wrote *The Optimist's Daughter*. She remained in Mississippi, though reluctantly, through the Civil Rights

movement. In letters to Mary Lou Aswell during this time, Welty writes, "But you can imagine how sometimes I wish I could leave Jackson, Mississippi – the South" (August 14, 1963), "Perfectly awful man elected governor here last night – the one I dreaded but knew would get it. If I could I'd pick mother up and leave this abysmal spot for evermore" (August 28, 1963), and "But things in Mississippi get worse and worse, and Mother is in Yazoo City, which is a little, rich Delta town with many more blacks than whites, and is reputed to be now the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan. Our state is now authorized to get 200 more patrol cars on the roads and arm the highway patrol – just one thing. I hear that this summer all hell is going to break loose" (March 25, 1964). Despite wanting to leave the South, her mother's health prohibited her from doing so.

Welty withstood criticism for not including enough about the life of African Americans in *Delta Wedding*, and she explained her reasons to Russell in a 1945 letter: "[I]n 1923 the subject of race conflict etc. would never dream of arising in a house like my Delta house and anywhere else during a wedding." However, the subject of race conflict is present throughout *Delta Wedding* as the Fairchilds interact with the African Americans on a daily basis and live a life that is built upon the labor and aid of these African Americans. The subject of race conflict would have arisen during the 1960s, though maybe not at a funeral. Welty does not ignore racial conflict in *The Optimist's Daughter* either. In this novel, Welty faces the growing racial tensions head-on and includes the heroic story of Clint McKelva facing down the Ku Klux Klan. The political climate is present in both novels, but in both she remains true to herself and does not crusade.

Welty's preparation for *Delta Wedding* differed greatly from her preparation for writing *The Optimist's Daughter*. Welty sought John Robinson's advice throughout the process of

writing her Delta novel. She used his family connections in the Delta to get to know the place, the people, and their history. Welty took several trips to the Delta as she was changing her story into a novel, and while there, she spent time with Robinson's family and read the diaries of Nancy McDougall Robinson, John's great grandmother who settled in the Delta with her husband when it was primarily wilderness. Welty read Nancy Robinson's diary much like the Fairchilds read Mary Shannon's diary. *Delta Wedding* is not a veiled telling of the Robinson family's story; Welty's novel is purely fiction, but her time visiting with Robinson's family and reading the diaries gave Welty insight into an area of the state about which she knew very little. Welty wrote Russell about the diaries, "I went to the Delta and read the diaries and thought they were wonderful. They were so touching and the woman's character was heroic and her troubles hard, and all the same she had a poetic approach to them (not philosophical) as time went on – I could not forget the way she lived" (February 20, 1945). Welty's letter to Robinson after reading his great-grandmother's diary was more specific. She writes:

> I felt something for her so personal, so real … – everything seemed perfectly natural & clear to me because I felt what I did for this lady who lived that hundred years back. There was a kind of greatness about her that seemed to make everything else fall in place – I can't tell you how all she said and did in those diaries moved me – it was a stirring and beautiful kind of experience, that kept me reading without stopping a day, most of a night, all the next day, and when I did fall asleep I seemed not to be forgetting her – not dreaming anything about her, but <u>thinking</u> of her through the night. I still do. All she went through, yes, but the simplicity that was really a tragic and poetic approach to life, a higher dignity than mere fortitude – … I mean there was a point where she might have been

> formed by things or destroyed by them, and she was very heroic in trouble but she was also very tender and malleable in devotion to him, and so did not break. … Her wisdom seemed so very deep inside her, so innate – not raw or freshly learned, but instinctive or profoundly given to her by love and friendship, things she would not question or need to. She knew all she needed to – how little people can do besides give of themselves – she knew anxiety and trouble were real. The dangers of the world she knew about. And pleasure she knew from knowing dangers more than from memories of those flighty days in Port Gibson, I think. She knew it from wishing her world to be a good place, now in that moment, present joy for her people she loved. (February 13, 1945)

Welty related to Nancy Robinson and the life she lived. She found in the woman strength and endurance in facing tragedies and trials, and Welty allowed herself to be swept away by the life of the woman. Welty read the diaries at a time in her life when she faced her own challenges. With her brothers, her friends, and the man she loved away at war and in constant danger, Welty too experienced "a point where she might have been formed by things or destroyed by them," and she too knew "anxiety and trouble were real" while also believing there exists good in the world, and Nancy Robinson provided an example of how to not break in these moments but to face them head-on. In the novel, Mary Shannon is always there in the background, though she is not an integral part of the story, and in the same way, Nancy Robinson is there in the background as Welty writes her novel – her impression is clear but her presence is not overt.

Welty uses Nancy Robinson's diaries to learn about life in the Delta, but she does not need this kind of research when writing *The Optimist's Daughter*. With this novel, Welty relies on her memory and her own family's story to provide the background information. She gives

Becky a home in West Virginia that came out of Chestina's home and Eudora's time spent there during the summers growing up. She uses the letters written by her own parents and her grandmother as guides when she writes of the letters Laurel finds in her mother's desk. In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty writes of her parents' letters,

> Their letters had all been kept by that great keeper, my mother … I didn't in the end feel like a trespasser when I came to open the letters: they brought my parents before me for the first time as young, as inexperienced, consumed with the strength of their hopes and desires, as *living* on these letters. I would have known my mother's voice in her letters anywhere. But I wouldn't have so quickly known my father's … letters that are so ardent, so direct and tender in expression, so urgent, that they seemed to bare, along with his love, the rest of his whole life to me. (*Stories* 917-8)

Unlike Clint McKelva, Welty's father had not thrown away his wife's letters, which provided Welty with correspondences from both parents. And unlike Laurel, Welty read the letters her father wrote her mother, and through this reading, Welty came to know her father in a way more complete than their lives together had taught her. Welty also writes that after they die is "the time we so often learn fundamental things about our parents" (917), and this is true of Laurel's journey throughout *The Optimist's Daughter*.

Welty's last novel was set during contemporary times and involved a contemporary family from a town not much different from the Jackson in which Welty lived. She did not need to research the ways of life in the time period, the place, or the people in order to render the novel realistic. She used her own experiences and life to provide that context. After the deaths of her mother and Edward, Welty wrote to Mary Lou Aswell that "all my good Jackson friends

stood solidly & still are the steady & constant help I needed" (February 3, 1966), just as the McKelvas' Mount Salus friends had for Laurel. *The Optimist's Daughter* is by no means an autobiography, but it does rely heavily on Welty's parents' relationship, their histories, the lives of those she knew, and the emotions she had experienced in the decade leading to its publication.

There were two great loves in Welty's life, John Robinson and Ken Millar, and these relationships coincided with the writing of the two novels. Eudora Welty began her relationship with John Robinson in 1937 (though his family was from the Delta, he had gone to high school with her), and the relationship had periods of distance and closeness until 1951, when Welty realized Robinson's relationship with Enzo Rocchigiani was not a fraternal one. Her intimate relationship with Robinson spanned the time when Welty was twenty-nine until she was forty-two – the typical age by which women in that era were married and had children. During the World War II years when Welty wrote *Delta Wedding*, her letters to Robinson show a deep and intense love for him and concern for his safety. The other love of Welty's life was Ken Millar, a mystery writer who used the pen name Ross MacDonald and whose writing Welty loved. Millar was as ardent an admirer of Welty's writing as Welty was of his. They began their relationship through letters, and it remained the primary means through which they communicated until the end of Millar's life. Though Millar was married, he and Welty maintained a deep love for each other from their first meeting in 1971 until his death in 1983. In his first letter to Welty, Millar, knowing of Welty's own personal losses, writes of his daughter's death. Though Welty was working on final typescripts and galleys of *The Optimist's Daughter* when her relationship Millar began, he still made an impact on the novel. Welty added the section about Laurel and Phil's relationship as a confluence after a letter from Millar following his reading of Welty's story "A Still Moment," which Millar calls "Your 'convergence' story" (Marrs 362). In a letter

dated January 14, 1972, Welty writes Millar, "There is one paragraph in it, Ken, that never existed in the first version at all, and it wouldn't be there now if it hadn't been for our writing each other some letters. You will know. It comes nearly at the end, where and when it came to me – came back to me." Near the end of writing the novel, Welty's life and Millar's life came together as if in confluence, just like Laurel's life had converged with Phil's. Both Laurel and Welty were limited in the relationship with the men they loved – Laurel and Phil's lives together had been cut short by Phil's death, and Welty and Millar's relationship was thwarted by Millar's marital status.

Both *Delta Wedding* and *The Optimist's Daughter* are dedicated to people Welty loved immensely – John Robinson and Chestina Welty, respectively. That Welty wrote the novels for these two people is not insignificant. With *Delta Wedding*, Welty writes for a man still living but in danger whom she misses and with whom she intends to spend her life after the war. In many ways, the novel itself serves as a love letter to Robinson. She provided him with a taste of home, of family, of history, of love while he was away. The times when Welty was writing the story, she thought of Robinson and wanted the story to be right for him, and she wanted it to reflect home for him. While she notes in a letter to Russell that the Delta story made Robinson homesick (June 12, 1945), it seems Welty intended for the story to soothe his homesickness by bringing a piece of home to him in Italy. It only made him long for home more, but that wasn't the intention. With *The Optimist's Daughter*, Welty writes for her now deceased mother. In this novel, Welty presents a daughter whose love for her mother is not weakened by the years of anguish and torment caused by the mother's declining health. This novel is not a love letter, though it was written out of love, but it pays homage to her mother's life, the home her mother left when she moved to Jackson with Christian Welty, and the home and life Chestina and

Christian built together with their three children. Just as Laurel walks away from Mount Salus with the life she lived with her parents firmly planted in her memory, Welty too is able to move on from her grief by clinging to her life with her parents and brothers as they still exist in her memory – "the treasure most dearly regarded" by her (948).

Home – "a kind of 'book' that is read by the body through its interactions" and "a schema of relationships that brings order, integrity, and meaning to experience in place" (Dovey 39, 43). Home is the place Welty continually left and to which she returned. In an interview, Welty said, "I am interested in human relationships … Certainly it begins in the family and extends out and out" (*More Conversations* 90). The family center is the home. The homes in Welty's fiction serve as a pinning-down place for the characters, but they are also places with which the characters share an identity. It is often not until the characters journey away from and, sometimes, back to the home place that their personal identity, their identity of home, and how home has shaped their world view are realized.

NOTES

[1] By environmental quality, Tuan refers to the whole environment around those who inhabit a space as opposed to solely focusing on a private and personal conception of space.

[2] I will be using the Library of America texts of Welty's novels, stories, essays and memoir. These two volumes have become widely adopted by Welty scholars as the critical texts. The *Complete Novels* volume includes: *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942), *Delta Wedding* (1946), *The Ponder Heart* (1954), *Losing Battles* (1970), and *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). The *Stories, Essays, and Memoir* volume includes stories from: *A Curtain of Green* (1941), *The Wide Net* (1943), *The Golden Apples* (1949), *The Bride of Innisfallen* (1955), and *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984). It also includes the uncollected late stories "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" (1963) and "The Demonstrators" (1966). The volume includes the following selected essays: "A Pageant of Birds" (1943), "Some Notes on River Country" (1944), "Writing and Analyzing a Story" (1955), "Place in Fiction" (1956), "A Sweet Devouring" (1957), "Must the Novelist Crusade?" (1965), "'Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?'" (1974), "The Little Store" (1975) and the Preface to *Collected Stories* (1980). Works not included in the Library of America volumes will be cited individually. Drafts of *One Writer's Beginnings* from the Eudora Welty Collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History will be listed both in the works cited page and in parenthetical citations as *One Writer's Beginnings*, which distinguishes itself from the final version that is included and cited in The *Stories, Essays, and Memoir*.

[3] One such example is on p. 164 of *More Conversations with Eudora Welty*.

[4] Chapters I, II, IV, and VII have two parts, Chapter III has six parts (Though part 2 is never marked, the break in the part can be assumed to be when the point of view shifts from Ellen to Laura). Chapter V has nine parts, and Chapter VI has four.

[5] Ruth M. Vande Kieft's *Eudora Welty* may be the most prominent example of a New Critical reading of Welty's works. Robert Penn Warren's essay "The Love and Separateness in Miss Welty" and Suzanne Ferguson's "The 'Assault of Home': Style's Substance in Welty's 'The Demonstrators'" are also examples. Rebecca Mark's *The Dragon's Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty's* The Golden Apples and Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990* are the two most prominent examples of feminist interpretations of Welty's works.

[6] John Alexander Allen's essay "The Other Way to Live: Demigods in Eudora Welty's Fiction" and "Technique as Myth: The Structure of *The Golden Apples*" by Daniele Pitavy-Souques are other examples of this.

[7] Michael Kreyling's "Modernism in Welty's *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*" and "Traditionalism and Modernism in Eudora Welty" by Chester E. Eisinger are two examples.

[8] *Place in American Fiction* edited by H. L. Weatherby and George Core base their entire collection on Welty's essay "Place in Fircion," and in the collection Denins Donoghue explores place in Welty's fiction. Other examples include Suzanne Marrs' essay "Place and the Displaced in Eudora Welty's *The Bride of Innisfallen*," Bessie Chronaki's "Eudora Welty's Theory of Place and Human Relationships," Elmo Howell's "Eudora Welty and the Use of Place in Southern Fiction," and Malinda Snow's "On the Map: Finding Place and Identity in *Delta Wedding*."

[9] Marion Montgomery builds on Gretlund's work reiterating the idea of focusing on Welty's place more than that of her characters'. Robert B. Holland calls Welty a regionalist writer and uses that assumption for his ideas of place in *The Ponder Heart*.

[10] Albert J. Devlin's *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life* and "Eudora Welty's Mississippi" are the most prominent examples, but Marion Montgomery's *Eudora Welty and Walker Percy: The Concept of Home in Their Lives and Literature* and Louise Bogan's "The Gothic South" are other examples.

[11] John Edward Hardy's "Delta Wedding as Region and Symbol," Devlin's "Eudora Welty's Mississippi" and *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life*, Marrs' *One Writer's Imagination* and Gretlund's *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place* are all examples of this.

[12] Ann Romines in both *The Home Plot* and "Reading the Cakes: *Delta Wedding* and the Texts of Southern Women's Culture" focuses on gender and domesticity. Laura Sloan Patterson's "Sexing the Domestic: Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding* and the Sexology Movement," Susan V. Donaldson's "Gender and History in Eudora Welty's *Delta Wedding*," Elizabeth Kerr's "The World of Eudora Welty's Women," John Edward Hardy's "Marrying Down in Eudora Welty's Novels," and Margaret Jones Bolsterli's "Woman's Vision: The Worlds of Women in *Delta Wedding*, *Losing Battles*, and *The Optimist's Daughter*" are all examples of feminist or gender related studies on the novels.

[13] Kreyling's *Understanding Welty* and Marrs' *One Writer's Imagination* are a couple of examples of this, and Elizabeth Evans' essay "Eudora Welty and the Dutiful Daughter" also touches on the similarities between Welty's life and the novel.
[14] Thomas Daniel Young's "Social Form and Social Order: An Examination of *The Optimist's Daughter*," "The Role of Family in *Delta Wedding*, *Losing Battles*, and *The Optimist's Daughter*" by Jane L. Hinton provide examples of this.
[15] Welty mentions this in letters to John Robinson (June 10, 1945) and Diarmuid Russell (June 12, 1945)
[16] Though Marmion is a house that is owned by the Fairchilds, it is far from a home. None of the living Fairchilds identify with the house. The house stands as a reminder of the death of James and Laura Allen and remains abandoned. There is potential for Dabney and Troy Flavin to make it a home, but at no point in the novel does Marmion even slightly resemble a home for the Fairchilds. In fact, Dabney seems to want to de-Fairchild the house. She is horrified by the actions of her grandfather and his willingness to die over cotton; the generational gap between James Fairchild and Dabney allows her to embrace Marmion not as a family home with a painful history but as merely a house – "the magnificent temple-like, castle-like house, with the pillars springing naked from the ground, and the lookout tower, and twenty-five rooms, and inside, the wonderful free-standing stair – the chandelier, chaliced, golden in light, like the stamen in the lily down-hanging. The garden – the play house – the maze" (160). The description is the polar opposite of Laura's description of Shellmound; what strikes Dabney is not the family connection but its grandeur and the status that the house offers.
[17] The reader does not get Lady Clare's perspective in the novel, and she first appears in town for the wedding, she is being told to go outside of the house, so it is hard to say how she perceives the Fairchild homes.
[18] It is important to note that all references throughout the novel (regardless of point of view) to family kin come from the relation to the youngest generation of Fairchilds. So, for example, Great-Great-Grandfather George was the great-great-grandfather of Laura.
[19] The reader sees this again with the Fairchild store. Any member of the Fairchild family can take whatever they want from the store without paying for it. Everything in the store is seen as family property.
[20] Laura's decision to leave and the realization that she does not share an identity with the Fairchilds will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Four.
[21] Laurel's Chicago home will be discussed in Chapter Four.
[22] The final resolution of this struggle will be discussed in Chapter Four.
[23] Jim Shimkus points this out in his article on Alston's illustrations, "Author and Artist: Welty and Charles Alston" in the *Eudora Welty Newsletter*.
[24] In the short story "Delta Cousins," the character that would become Ellen Fairchild was named Mim Fairchild, and all references in it to Aunt Ellen were to Aunt Mim.
[25] Though George and Robbie Reid have been married since Mary Denis Summer's wedding, they did not have a wedding. They ran off late at night to get married (145).
[26] It is interesting that Robbie and George's Memphis workers are not named in the novel. In the Fairchild dwellings that qualify as homes, Welty gives the black characters names.
[27] That Aunt Mac is washing and ironing the payroll leads one to think that Ellen is not allowed to control the books because she is not a born Fairchild and not because of gender.
[28] Once Laurel has arrived in Mount Salus, the narrator points out that the hearse "turned to the left on Main Street" and "blotted out the Courthouse fence" (912). If the hearse was able to cover the fence, the courthouse must be located there. Laurel took a "right on Main Street and drove the three and a half blocks" (912), meaning the McKelva home would be three and a half blocks from the courthouse.
[29] I discuss Fay and her family as outsiders more specifically in chapter three.
[30] It is interesting to note that George here refers to Memphis, not Shellmound, as home.
[31] It is of interest to note that Robbie Reid wanders through the woods and fields as she walks from Fairchilds to Shellmound later in the novel.
[32] It is unclear whether Laurel will return to Mount Salus to be buried with her mother. She has created a life in Chicago, and when she leaves Mount Salus, it seems as if she has no intention of returning. Phil's body was never recovered, so there is no cemetery in which she can be buried with him.
[33] In a letter to William Maxwell, Welty explains that the nurse in the room when Welty's brother Edward died claims that Edward's wife, Elinor, grabbed and attacked him just as Fay does to Clint (*What There Is To Say* 225).

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